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THE GREATER JOY

By
MARGARET BLAKE



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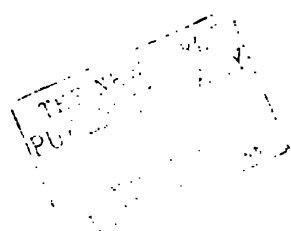
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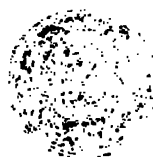


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A Romance

BY

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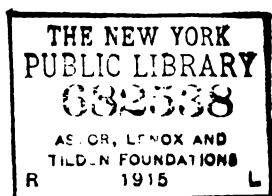
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The Greater Joy

ROY W. B.
J. B. B.
W. B. B.

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THE GREATER JOY

CHAPTER I

"Alice Vaughn," said the head nurse sententiously, "inasmuch as the incomparably senile old fossils who run this institution have prohibited our hazing probationary nurses as formerly, we are reluctantly forced to resort to these means of testing your fitness to be in our midst. The Court of Inquiry, which you see here convened, has prepared a series of questions to be put to you, and which you must answer. Our reason for doing so is not a frivolous one. We want no mental or ethical tenderfeet in our midst. We are determined to weed out the unfit at the beginning of every term. Now, if you are the kind of girl who blushes every time mention is made of an obstetrical instrument, we'd rather get rid of you at the start."

The person to whom these words were addressed started slightly and a faint flush overspread her face and neck. The nurse continued:

"If you are squeamish, and prefer to avoid cross-examination, you are at liberty to walk out of this room unmolested. You will have no malice to fear from us in the future, nor yet any kindness to expect. You will be immune from both.

"Alice Vaughn, do you prefer to leave us while there

is yet time? Once the inquiry has begun, you must remain until it is finished, and I warn you, you must keep your countenance, or we'll have you up for contempt of court. Alice Vaughn, the Court awaits your answer!"

Lottie Hamblin, the nurse who delivered this absurd charge, was small, dark and wiry. About her, in a semicircle, seated on the floor for lack of sufficient chairs, were two and twenty young women in nurse's garb. All eyes were focussed upon the girl addressed.

Alice Vaughn, probationary nurse at ——— Hospital, Manhattan, was of an unusually fair type of blonde. It was to her remarkable pallid coloring that the impression of transcendent loveliness, which she conveyed, was usually ascribed. The charm which she radiated was due fully as much to the gentle sweetness of her manner as to her beauty, and her features were as exquisite as her coloring. Her complexion was creamily white, like the petals of a jonquil or a water-lily; her lips were the pale pink of Japanese coral, showing her to be anæmic, and her halo of fair hair attracted attention by the absence of the golden lustre, which usually is the chief glory of fair women. In spite of this singularity, perhaps because of it, her hair contained a strange allure. It drew the eyes again and again, like a magnet—making the beholder search his memory for something of similar hue with which to compare it. But the quest was usually fruitless. The right metaphor eluded those who sought it.

She had regained her composure, and stood quietly behind the barrier formed by an old-fashioned sofa and a table, arranged to represent a prisoner's dock. There was nothing in her manner now of either embarrassment or self-consciousness. She did not reply at once, and Lottie Hamblin said tartly:

"Why don't you reply, Miss Vaughn? Unless you do, we'll have you up for contempt of court."

"If you please," spoke up the young girl dryly, "what is the penalty for contempt of court?"

Lottie grinned. The newcomer had a sense of humor. It boded well.

"We haven't quite decided," she replied. "But it will be nothing less than making you eat ten pounds of chocolate peppermints at a sitting."

"Who pays for them, you or I?" laughed Alice, quick as a flash.

The two and twenty girls sitting in the semicircle smilingly evinced their appreciation.

"Look here, Miss Vaughn," went on Lottie Hamblin severely, "you haven't told us yet whether you'll stay, or go."

"I certainly prefer jolly companionship to the cold shoulder," said Alice softly.

"I appeal to the Court," cried Lottie. "Are we going to like the newcomer?"

"Indeed we are!" shouted the two and twenty.

"You hear, Miss Vaughn?" said Lottie, with feigned pompousness. "The Court is indulgent. Now, are you ready for the Ordeal by Fire?"

"Fire ahead!" said Alice calmly.

Silence fell about the listeners. They all knew the nature of the questions to be propounded to the slim, fair young girl, and some of them had the grace to feel a slight embarrassment. One girl giggled. Lottie coughed ominously.

"Miss Vaughn, how old were you when you first knew what the conjugal relation actually is?"

Alice had expected some absurd query, some wretched tomfoolery such as girls sometimes indulge in, and had

braced herself to cope with fantastic but innocent nonsense. The brutal question, for which she was wholly unprepared, once more brought the color to her face as from the sting of a lash. Her mouth quivered, but her eyes were cold and angry. She answered defiantly,

"Sixteen."

"Spirit, my child, is excellent; temper reprehensible," Lottie reproved her in a maternal tone. "What did you think of the revelation?"

"I thought it vile, abominable, detestable, and think so still whenever I happen to think of it, which isn't often."

"And how old are you now?"

"Nineteen."

"Well, well, you seem to be less variable in your opinions than most of your sex. But there is plenty of time ahead of you in which to mature. Who told you—ahem—acquainted you with the particulars?"

"A friend," Alice answered shortly. Tears were rising in her throat and laughter was plucking at her lips—tears of mortification and embarrassment, and laughter that was akin to hysteria.

"A friend, you say, told you. Yes, it is usually a friend. May I inquire, was the friend of masculine or feminine gender?"

"A girl, of course." The young nurse's eyes were ablaze with indignation.

"That is by no means a matter of course, Miss Vaughn," said Lottie indulgently. "Young men, as well as young women, have been known to possess the knowledge requisite for imparting such information."

Alice could not repress the smile which the inquisitor's facility at repartee brought to her lips.

"Why are you laughing?" Lottie demanded, feigning anger. "You are expected, Miss Vaughn, to preserve

perfect gravity of demeanor. Your mirth is unseemly."

"Even when it is a tribute to your wit?" demanded Alice.

Pretending not to hear, Lottie turned to the others:

"Do you think we are going to like this young woman, gentlemen of the jury—I meant to say, ladies of the court?"

"We are going to love her!" shouted the two and twenty.

Lottie resumed: "Have you ever been kissed, Miss Vaughn, or are you an un-kissed daughter?"

"Mother always kissed me good night," Alice responded with the utmost gravity.

"Oh dear, oh dear, such innocence! By a man, my child, by a man!"

"Father also always kissed me good night."

The two and twenty embraced each other with rapturous mirth.

"Hear, hear!" they shouted. "Hear, hear!"

Lottie pounded the floor with the gavel.

"Would you consider it preferable to be the wife of a man you didn't love or the mistress of a man you adored?"

"I object," interrupted Alice. "I cannot answer that question intelligently, because I have been confronted with the first contingency only, and that, Heaven knows, was bad enough."

"Do you mean us to infer from that that you have never been in love?"

"Never!"

"And you are nineteen! Young ladies, did any of you attain the age of nineteen without being in love? All those who did say 'aye.'"

There were no "ayes," and the girls, contorting their

faces to express incredulity and wonderment, looked at each other gravely, wagging their heads from side to side, with an inanity of expression that would have done credit to the chorus of a musical comedy.

"Have any of you reached eighteen without being in love? None. Seventeen, sixteen, fifteen? One 'aye.' Only one 'aye' at fifteen. Miss Vaughn, here are twenty-two normal, healthy, young women, and out of the twenty-two only one reached fifteen years of age without having been in love. And you at nineteen claim to be ignorant of the sensation. Are you quite sure you are speaking the truth and nothing but the truth?"

"Quite sure."

"Well, then, you have my sympathy for your backwardness. You'd better hurry and make up for lost time. It's very sweet to be in love."

"Is it?" queried Alice ironically.

"Hush; you are here to answer questions, not to ask them. Has any man ever made love to you?"

"I am afraid I shall have to ask for a definition of the phrase, 'making love,' before I can reply intelligently."

The two and twenty fairly exploded with enjoyment.

"Miss Vaughn," said Lottie severely, "such frivolity is lamentable. If you were an ugly young woman, your retort would have moved the Court and myself to pity, to compassion, for we are by no means without heart. We would even have been tempted to dress up one of our number as a man with instructions to 'make love' to you, in order to afford you the experience which you pretend you lack. But you are a phenomenally lovely young woman, and it is quite unthinkable that you have not already tempted more than one masculine creature to make eyes at you. We will, therefore, dispense with a

truthful reply to my last query, and proceed to the next. Has any man ever proposed to you?"

"Yes."

"What did you do?"

"I accepted him."

A shout of laughter rang through the room. In vain Lottie pounded the floor with the gavel. The girls were uproarious.

Lottie finally succeeded in making herself heard.

"You are trifling with the Court!" she shouted. "Remember the ten pounds of chocolate to be eaten at one sitting! You'll be sick for a week! You'll never be able to tolerate the sight of sweets again! What do you mean by saying you engaged yourself to be married after pretending such highfaluting disgust with matrimony?"

"Oh, dear," said Alice petulantly, "I assure you I am speaking the truth. When I engaged myself I didn't know what marriage meant. As soon as I knew I broke the engagement."

She laughed nervously, and two red spots appeared on either cheek.

"Heavens and earth!" exclaimed Lottie. "Devilish interesting this is. But perceive, if you please, Miss Vaughn, that the Court is not devoid of delicacy. We are extremely interested in your remarkable confession, but we refrain from further inquiries, realizing that your personal affairs are none of our business. One more question, Miss Vaughn, and then this trial, in which you have borne yourself with praiseworthy fortitude, will be over. Do you really think you will never change—do you really never intend to marry?"

The two little red spots on either cheek deepened, and Alice's fingers locked and interlocked nervously.

"I shall never marry," she said weakly.

"You are not observing precision in replying. Precision is a very important quality in women of our profession. Do you really never intend to marry?"

Alice's embarrassment became painfully apparent. This was sudden and unexpected, for she had taken the verbal hazing good-naturedly, and the girls looked at each other in astonishment.

"I do not intend to marry," she said half-defiantly. "I shall never marry a man I do not love. And—I do not want to fall in love."

To the consternation of the other young women, she burst into tears.

She could not tell them—how could she?—that for over a year a frightful feeling of fear had been growing in her, fear of meeting a man with whom she would fall in love. Instinctively she felt that love would mean more to her than to the average woman, that if any obstacle were to interpose between the man and herself, she would go mad. And yet she had spoken the truth during the catechism.

This frame of mind is not unusual with young girls. Modesty, decorum, decency, the sense of propriety of a well-bred girl tend to make the marriage relation appear as an indescribably revolting tie; but the deeper instincts of sex, of the flesh—sometimes purely of maternity—entice the pure-minded young girl into new channels, and she soon finds that the gulf between herself and the rest of womankind, between herself, her mother and her grandmother, is not as impassable as she would like to believe.

On seeing Alice's tears, Lottie and the other nurses were filled with compunction. The newcomer had borne herself so well through the ordeal, and had taken everything in such good part, that they felt sorry for her.

They filed out of the room, and when they had gone, the head nurse very kindly apologized for having carried the joke so far. Later the girls came back, marching two by two, and carrying ice cream, bonbons, cakes, and some delicious fancy sandwiches.

Alice joined heartily in the merriment that followed, and to her surprise enjoyed the evening immensely, for the girls were lively and witty, and better bred than Alice had believed possible while her castigation was going on. Moreover, it was a great novelty and a great treat for her to find herself among a lot of bright, mischievous girls of her own age. She did not even regret the humiliating culmination of the hazing, since it seemed to have created a feeling of general good-fellowship.

But when at last she was alone in her own dormitory, a myriad of recollections came flooding back to worry her and keep her awake.

She remembered poignantly the afternoon when her bosom chum, Sally Hoskins, had acquainted her with the mystery of life. She was only sixteen, and one of the boys, five years older than she, who had gone all through school with her, had asked her to marry him. Apparently every one knew that he was going to ask her to be his wife, for her aunt, who had adopted her after her parents' death, had instructed her that when Ned asked her to marry him, it would be her duty to accept him, because it was part of the plan of Nature to have girls marry, and Ned, having well-to-do people, would be able to give her a comfortable home. This, her aunt said, was providential, for she had very little money to leave Alice, as her widow's pension, on which she principally depended for ready cash, would, of course, cease with her demise. Alice had not questioned her aunt's arguments in the least. She was a docile girl, and moreover,

she lived so intensely in her own world of dreams and books that realities mattered very little. She was a great reader, and her uncle's library was filled with books of all sorts—books good, bad and indifferent, and, undetected by her aunt, who lived in gentlewomanly ignorance of the poison for young minds that lurked behind the covers of some of the volumes, she spent entire days devouring English translations of French masterpieces—books hardly fit reading for a girl of sixteen brought up in the secluded and compressed atmosphere of a New England household.

Her imagination, of course, had taken fire, but with the god-like virginity of mind that is possible only in a state of perfect innocence, this girl of sixteen, knowing no evil, had seen none in the books which she read, had perceived only the delicacy of sentiment. To her a *liaison* was only a sweet-sounding foreign word for a friendship, dignified by secrecy, unsoiled by sordid and mercenary thoughts. These women, wives of rich, odious, neglectful husbands, who had barely a sou in their purses, who asked their "lovers" to play at *rouge et noir* for them, who won fabulous sums and divided them with their impecunious "lovers;" or who begged fortunes from aged relatives to pour them into the hands of their admirers, seemed to her not women of flesh and blood, not puppets who existed merely on paper, but creatures from fairyland—goddesses.

How wonderful was life, she mused! In those far-away days she had thought how happy she would be if some day, when Ned and she were married, she might drive through the streets of a great city, to seek in some odd way to make her fortune, with a handsome young man at her side, who adored her and had not a sou—or a penny—in his pocket, and who was her lover.

But one thought troubled her in those early days, an inchoate thought—a thought that was still unborn but which kept trembling somewhere on the threshold of her consciousness, that pulsed near the base of her brain. What had her aunt meant when she said that it was part of Nature's plan that girls should marry? Was there more to marriage than she knew? What more could it be than living under the same roof with a man, in the same house, and sleeping with him in the same room? She had thought in those innocent days that it must be terribly embarrassing to sleep in the same room with a man, even though he were your husband. She was unusually modest, even for a girl. She remembered how one time, when she had slept at Sally's house, and had shared Sally's room for the night, Sally had laughed at her for virtually dressing and undressing with her nightgown on, because the thought that Sally might see her bare limbs outraged her sense of decorum.

Soon after that she had become engaged to Ned, and Ned had kissed her twice, once on either cheek. But he had often kissed before, when they were boy and girl in school; he had frequently kissed her after carrying home her books for her from school. But a few evenings after that he had kissed her on the lips, and the sensation of his warm, moist mouth had been very disagreeable to her, had made her think of touching a snail or a caterpillar. But she had not liked to tell him this; he had seemed so happy because she had allowed him to kiss her lips.

One day her aunt had told her to avoid walking past a certain house as much as possible, and when Alice had asked the reason her aunt had said: "The woman who lives there is not a good woman; she has an illicit love affair." And Alice had never forgotten the look on her

aunt's face as she said this. It had been a look of loathing and disgust, and somehow it seemed to the girl that there was insinuated into it a bit of envy. After that she had something more to wonder about. What did that mean—"an illicit love affair?" If only she had dared to ask Sally about this and also about marriage. But Sally was always calling her "silly," and she would certainly think it ridiculous of her to imagine there might be something else to marriage than what every one knew, or that an "illicit love affair" meant anything else than merely being fond of a man who wasn't your husband. But why should there be such a fuss about it if a woman happened to be fond of some other man, since she was permitted to be fond of other women, and no one thought anything about it?

Nevertheless, the idea that there was "something else" persisted, and the young girl witnessed strange, unholy phantoms winging their way across the background of her consciousness. Yet always and always she kept them from crossing the threshold.

Then the unexpected happened. Sally had come to her one day, quite seriously, and without teasing or scoffing, had told Alice that she considered it her duty as an older friend to ask her, since she was engaged to be married, whether she knew just what the marriage relation was.

The young girl's ears were very pink, as she answered:

"I think—I suppose, I don't see what else it can be, but just sleeping together, or perhaps—don't think me horrid, will you, Sally?—having to undress in the same room. That seems dreadfully shocking to me."

Sally looked volumes.

"You poor, dear, innocent, white little lamb," she said, "you're engaged to be married, and it is just as I thought."

You have no idea what you are letting yourself in for."

"What—what is there, if not that?" she stammered.

Sally sighed. How in heaven's name was she to communicate the bald truth to this white-souled, little human blossom? She had been told herself, but she strongly disapproved of the candid fashion in which she had been apprised of the facts—for she was a delicate-minded girl, and she believed in maintaining as intact as possible the veil of discretion in which fastidious folks mask the raw nakedness of life. She was about to tear a deep rent in the gossamer fabric. The world would never look the same again to poor little Alice. But Sally was no coward, and she meant to acquit herself more creditably of her difficult task than *her* friend had done.

She began after the fashion of some obsolete theologians, by dwelling upon the fact that the body should be really considered the shadow of the soul, and marriage, or the union of a man and woman, as the fleshly counterpart or symbol of their spiritual union. But that, of course, was not plain enough, and she was forced, against her inclination, in order to accomplish her self-appointed task, to be frank and plain, without any verbal embroidery or mystical embellishment. Alice looked at her blankly with horror in her eyes, and cried out:

"Oh, Sally, I didn't think you were that sort of a girl——"

But the inchoate thought, inchoate and unshaped no longer, but full-born and clearly formulated, came and stared at Alice and smirked and laughed, and said, "You wouldn't listen to me, would you?"

Then had followed the necessity of breaking the engagement, for Alice was quite sure she would never care for Ned "in that way," as if any decent woman could ever care for any man in that way! She didn't believe it,

she wouldn't believe it, although Sally pityingly assured her that the ability to do so was what constituted the mystery of life. She felt so nauseated about the whole question of marriage that she was unable to touch food for several days, and whenever she thought of it, strange little spasms ran down her back and upward through her body. Her aunt refused to allow her to break the engagement, and when questioned as to her reasons for wishing to break it, she could give none.

In her despair she went to Sally's mother, hoping that she would understand a detailed explanation, for Sally told her that it was really her mother and not herself who had suspected Alice's abysmal ignorance. Sally's mother understood, and promised to speak to Ned. She must have been a very brave woman to speak to him as she did, for when he refused to release Alice she told him roundly that the girl, when she promised to marry him, had had no conception of what the relations of husband and wife were. Had any one in the little village of Westerley imagined that Mrs. Hoskins could speak so frankly to a young man on such delicate matters, they would have considered her an improper person, for Westerley was one of those communities where a strange code of propriety prevails, and though a woman may marry and have children, yet she must never discuss "such matters," and must allow her daughter to go to her husband wholly unprepared and uninformed, unless by the intervention of some instinct or miracle, knowledge comes to her.

So the engagement was definitely broken. Sally married a wealthy Bostonian, and her mother and father went abroad for a year. A little later Alice's aunt died. The young girl rented out the little homestead, and the rental, together with the meagre sum of money her aunt left

her, brought her about five hundred dollars a year. This would have been an ample income for Westerley, but then a slight incident changed the entire current of her life.

She fell ill, and an operation of the nose became necessary. Mrs. Hoskins happened to be back in New York at the time, and it was she who selected the hospital to which Alice was taken, and who selected the physician. The operation was not a very serious one, and the young girl found, to her surprise, that she was thoroughly enjoying her stay in the hospital.

A very romantic girl, it seemed to Alice that to take care of the sick, to nurse them and make them happy and comfortable, was the most ideal work to which a woman could aspire. She thought she would like to be a nurse, and she spoke to Mrs. Hoskins about it. Mrs. Hoskins at first violently opposed the plan, but Alice was so insistent, that Sally's mother finally yielded. Alice had another reason for wishing to become a nurse. Her studies would take her away from Westerley, and she would not be forced to see Ned, who, since their unfortunate engagement, had inspired her with a sort of terror, particularly as, soon after her new knowledge had come to her, she began to have a strange premonition of what love might some day mean to her.

Of all this she thought, as she lay between sleeping and waking, and finally she fell asleep, wondering what the conqueror would be like, and when he would come into her life.

CHAPTER II

Alice was happy in the vocation she had selected. The work appealed to her, and she took a keen delight in the acquisition of medical knowledge. She was the youngest probationary nurse, and partly because of this, and partly because of her singular beauty, she was spoiled and petted by every one. She decided to take up a course in medicine after finishing the course in nursing, and the resident physician, an elderly man, Doctor Etheridge, was extremely proud of his "youngest gosling," and embraced every chance that offered itself of extending exceptional opportunities to her.

Connected with the hospital proper, where the nurses received their training, was the New York Institute of Medical Research, of which Doctor Etheridge was the actual head. The work of the institute was highly specialized, and Alice, who had studied stenography in the Westerley High School, was frequently called upon to perform the duties of amanuensis for Doctor Etheridge when he prepared his notes for publication or for the records of the institute.

Of course, Alice made a number of conquests that first year in the hospital, both among the physicians and among the patients. But while she liked some of her "victims" well enough, and was willing to be on perfectly friendly terms with them, they awakened no corresponding feeling in her. One of the patients was a very wealthy young man, and he was madly infatuated with her, and though she liked him very well indeed, she

would not consent to marry him. An inner voice warned her, whispered to her that the day would come when she would meet the man who indeed would be *the* man for her, who would dominate and enthrall her, whose personality would hold the subtle poison that would corrode her power of resistance, and make her willing to be moulded and shaped as he wished.

The thought fascinated and horrified her. The woman in her was maturing quickly, and with it came the strange conviction that love would mean more for her than for the average woman; that it would mean complete and absolute surrender of herself. She could not explain this feeling. But it was strong, it persisted, it haunted her. She began horribly to fear meeting the man who would mean so much to her.

One day there was brought into the hospital a man who was suffering from acromegalia. Alice had never before come in contact with this terrible disease. The man's hands and feet were almost twice their natural size; his head was enormous, repulsive, ghastly. His neck also had become enlarged, and the skin of his neck and throat had become baggy and pouchy, scaly, goitre-like. He was so weak that he could scarcely move, and he lay in a semi-comatose condition in the private room of the institute, into which he had been taken to facilitate examination. Through the enlargement of his body, his epidermis had assumed an unsightly, leatherlike, coarse aspect. The network of the skin of the hands, usually so fine as to be hardly perceptible, had become grotesquely conspicuous, veining hands and arms like deep canals cut through high, unsightly ridges. The pores yawned wide, like active craters, hideously, colossally repulsive. Every physician in town who heard of the case came in to look at the unfortunate man. As he was un-

conscious, they speculated in the room where he lay as to the probable duration of his life, of the manner in which death would come, of the possible change in his condition immediately preceding dissolution.

The second day after he had been brought in, Alice was on her way to the office on an errand, when she was stopped by the head-nurse, who was about to step into an elevator. The head-nurse seemed greatly flurried.

"My dear Miss Vaughn," she exclaimed, "just think of it. Doctor Baron von Dette and his cousin, Baroness Sylvia, are down stairs. I was on my way down stairs to help Doctor Etheridge entertain them. But an accident has occurred in the operating room and I must go right up. Go and make my excuses, and do what you can to make things agreeable for the cousin. She is quite a young girl. Do your prettiest." The elevator began to move before she had ceased speaking, and Alice, dismayed and annoyed, was left to proceed alone to the office.

There was that inflection in the head-nurse's voice as she spoke that told Alice that Doctor Baron von Dette was some distinguished man, although she had no recollection of having heard the name before. In pondering on the curious manner of the head-nurse, who was usually the most imperturbable of persons, a picture of the visitors formed itself upon the retina of her imagination.

Undoubtedly he was some yellow-haired, puffy, vulgar-looking, none-too-clean *savant*, who, through one of Nature's freaks, had received the gift of a remarkable brain. She knew that type of foreigner only too well. Or he was some old, pinched-looking, weazened monkey sort of man; or again, some man of massive countenance, with a long, unkempt beard. The cousin, doubt-

less, was some pretty, simple, stupid creature. Alice's notions of foreigners were not flattering.

But as she entered the little ante-room which adjoined the office, she became momentarily aware that there was nothing commonplace about the von Dettés. Even as she entered the room, on its very threshold, she was apprized in some intangible, occult way that the atmosphere which these two beings exhaled was surcharged with an ineffable grace, an indescribable, delicate, subtle refinement.

The Baroness was a petite, very young, very pretty, piquant brunette, excessively animated in manner; but in spite of her girlishness, in spite of her astounding vivacity which was discernible even when she was in repose, there was about her nothing callow or *gauche*. She carried herself wonderfully well. Alice had never seen such distinction in any woman, and this struck her as all the more remarkable because of the extreme youth and slight stature of her visitor. Her toilette was perfect. There was nothing offensively modish, nothing blatantly fashionable about it. The singular *chic* of her coiffure, her hat, her gown, bewildered Alice; the taste was so apparent, so well-defined, so undeniable, and the style was so intangible, so obliterated, so elusive.

All this Alice grasped on the instant. In another moment she had glanced at the young girl's cousin, Doctor Baron von Dette.

A man more than ordinarily tall, dark in complexion like his cousin, of undefinable age, wonderfully, almost insolently, well-groomed, with pallid hands and a pallid face and strangely luminous eyes, with a personality that was singularly effective, not so much for forcefulness conveyed as for forcefulness masked and hidden from sight. There was some latent strength in the man,

something vaguely titanic, some Herculean power that might become terrifying. But all this was not suggested by his languidly graceful manner which seemed rather to imperfectly veil the slumbering volcanic forces that were at work somewhere under the suave, smiling exterior of the famous physician. And what seemed most salient of all to Alice was that this man's presence carried with it the air of a man of the world, a man of leisure and pleasure, rather than that of the professional man whose activity is purely intellectual and never material.

She delivered the message to Doctor Etheridge and was introduced by him to the von Dettes. As the Baron bowed to her and then reseated himself, a strange, instinctive feeling of terror came over her. There was something colossal in that reserve strength of his. It seemed like a menace, it irritated her, fascinated her, moved her. When, after greeting her, he swept his eyes downward over her person and away from her, she seemed for one moment to be placed by herself on some lofty, isolated pinnacle, and there came an illusion to her as of a ribbon of light streaming from his eyes, a magic ribbon of light of no color, such as the moon sheds upon the rippling water in summer, or a searchlight swinging carelessly hither and thither, from sea to sky, from sky to sea, intertwining, interlacing, interweaving, impregnating and caressing the sea, and rending and piercing the heavens.

Breaking the awkward silence, Doctor Etheridge said:

"Doctor von Dette is anxious to see our beautiful case of acromegalia, Miss Vaughn, and now you have come, and as the Baroness does not care to admire our interesting specimen, we will leave her in your care."

"It is very good of Miss Vaughn to take the time to

entertain my cousin," said Doctor von Dette carelessly.

There was something in his manner of speaking, or in the voice, that irritated Alice unspeakably. Like his cousin, he spoke English perfectly. That he was a foreigner was evinced, not by an accent, but by a peculiar cadence, a sort of musical intonation of the voice.

The two young women were left alone.

"Men are very heartless," said the Baroness. "Fancy speaking so frivolously of such a terrible case."

"The heartlessness is pretended rather than real," replied Alice indulgently.

The Baroness smiled archly. With an amused glance from her dark eyes, she said:

"I forgot that I was speaking to a trained nurse."

"Who some day hopes to be a physician," added the girl quickly.

The Baroness settled herself very comfortably in her arm-chair, and regarded her companion with unfeigned astonishment.

"Do you really care so very much for an active life?" she asked.

"Why, yes, of course," said Alice, showing her surprise at the question.

"You are too beautiful to care a rap about the development of your brain capacity," said the Baroness calmly, with an air of finality. "It is a crime, nothing less, for a woman as beautiful as you are to develop anything but her beauty and the art of living."

Alice was amazed at this cynical view expressed by a girl at least a year her junior, but she did not betray her surprise.

"If a woman has not the means to cultivate the art of living," she responded, "it is perhaps wise to cultivate the means of living."

The Baroness laughed. Her laugh was frank, low-pitched and utterly sincere.

"If you had thought only of cultivating the art of living, you would not have had to bother about the other."

Alice smiled at the petulance with which the words were uttered.

"Tell me," she said mischievously, "just what do you designate as 'the art of living?'"

"First, last and all the time, the art of making yourself as pleasing as possible to the eye."

"To the feminine or to the masculine eye?" demanded Alice.

The Baroness sent forth a delicious peal of laughter.

"Frankly," she said, "what is your opinion? Do women dress for women or for men?"

"That means, I suppose, do women dress to annoy women or to please men?"

"You are adorable," cried the Baroness, and placing her muff across her knees, she folded her hands over it with a charming gesture of complete abandon. "Tell me," she entreated, "which is it?"

Alice regarded the young girl seated before her in this beseeching attitude intently, as she would have examined a beautiful picture, and felt a thrill of pleasure as she noted the various perfections of person and manner of the charming little Dresden China figure—the soft, olive-complexioned face with the rose-glow in the cheeks illumined by a pair of the most wonderful brown eyes. They were a soft, velvety brown, like the petals of a pansy, or the wing of a butterfly. They seemed like a pair of gems, like mysterious jewels, polished to incredible smoothness and alive with some inner flame.

"Which is it?" repeated the Baroness.

Alice passed her hand lightly over her eyes. She had

become serious suddenly. She found herself powerless to fling back some idle badinage in response to the question. It seemed to her that a truthful reply was required, that some matter of pith and moment, something of great weight depended upon the veracity with which she would reply.

"Is it not a matter of character, of temperament, of the individual?" she said, and as she gazed at the young girl sitting opposite to her, from whose lips the smile had gradually died away; it seemed to her that this strange, handsome creature was studying her furtively, searchingly, as if to surprise her in some expression that would bare her very soul. She became perplexed. To recover herself, she continued the conversation.

"Yourself," she said, "let us take yourself, for instance. You dress, do you not, solely to please yourself?"

"You are wrong," said the Baroness quietly. "Some day I will tell you for whom I dress, for I am sure we shall be friends—you and I." Rising abruptly, she walked rapidly the entire length of the room, and back again. She halted before Alice, her manner betraying agitation. "Yes, friends," she repeated softly. "It must be."

And these words, tragic of import, charged with some occult meaning, prophetic of some malignancy of fate, she uttered lightly, barely breathing the words, letting them flutter, as it were, from her lips.

Then she came and stood a little closer to Alice than before.

"How fair you are!" she exclaimed. "One would think you were a German."

"And you, one would think you were an American—your English is so fluent."

The Baroness gave a silvery, rippling laugh.

"Ever since I can remember," she said, "I have spoken English. I had three governesses, one English, one German, one French, and these governesses and their respective languages alternated one with the other. Ulrich says it is the only thing I do well—express myself. You must know he detests nothing so much as an unscientific mind. Poor Ulrich!"

"Ulrich is the Doctor Baron, I presume—or should I say the Baron Doctor?" said Alice. "Does the inherited title rank the acquired title?"

The Baroness looked vastly amused.

"The acquired title ranks the inherited title," she replied, "as you put it. I would say 'we keep the title we are born with closer to our skins than the other.'"

Alice's eyes twinkled. This girl certainly was delicious.

"I should think," she responded, "since you choose to put it that way, that you would keep the title that is earned closer 'to your skins.' Is a title earned by one's brains not better than an inherited title?"

The Baroness became grave.

"Brains are so plentiful, so abundant, nowadays," she said, "that to possess them no longer confers a distinction." She sighed. There was no insolence in her voice, although the words in themselves were arrogant. "Nothing really confers distinction nowadays," she continued moodily, "excepting a great sorrow."

She seated herself again, and looked across at Alice with a strange look of yearning in her beautiful, soulful eyes.

Her animation, in spite of her gravity, had not abated in the least. It had perhaps become a trifle accentuated. It seemed to Alice as if there were a note of hysteria in

her manner, and when she spoke again it was with an inflection that seemed to be propelled by some extraneous force.

"That is what I desire," she said quickly, "to be distinguished by the visitation of some devastating grief, some indomitable sorrow."

And, oddly enough, there seemed nothing morbid apparently in this young girl's strange desire for immolation.

"I have desired always to be vulgarly happy," said Alice.

"You cannot really mean that," said the Baroness. The words came swiftly, with unseasonable incisiveness. "You are too beautiful to be 'vulgarly happy.' Nature does not create paragons of physical perfection to torture them with an ordinary enjoyment of life. You will be either superhumanly happy or agonizingly miserable."

Again she rose and stood before Alice.

"How beautiful you are!" she said. "How beautiful your hair is! I would like to touch it. I will not disarrange it!"

And carefully, tenderly, exquisitely, after taking off her glove, she passed her fingers through the girl's blonde hair.

"How beautiful you are!" she repeated slowly, abruptly. A look of pain came into her eyes, and puckered her mouth into a quivering crimson line. Suddenly she stopped and kissed Alice on the forehead.

"I hope you will be 'vulgarly happy,' nevertheless," she said.

There was a noble simplicity in the words. Alice's wonder grew. What did it all mean? It was many weeks before she was destined to know.

After that, the Baroness walked to the window, and

gazed out upon the flagstones of the court abstractedly.

Alice was strangely troubled. As the young girl had kissed her, there had shuddered through her the thought of this girl's cousin, so handsome, so dark, so distinguished. Then came over her a terrible nervousness, such as she had never known before. And in the wake of this nervousness came terror. The atmosphere in the room seemed to become heavy, portentous, the air beat between them unquietly. In some unaccountable way Fate had bound into one strand the many that weave themselves into a human life, into a Gordian knot. A barrier seemed raised between her and that little, fragile figure gazing so intently with unseeing eyes upon the flagstones of the court. The kiss upon Alice's brow she felt had marked the beginning of some sinister, irremediable fate.

"How long they are!" said Alice finally.

She felt bewildered, ill at ease. She desired to make her escape. Without she heard the voice of Doctor von Dette, and its softness, its insinuating cadence, irritated her and annoyed her.

And when he stood before her, uttering some commonplace remarks, there swept over her with renewed vigor the impression that this man was pre-eminently a man of the world, not a *savant*; he impressed her as a man perfectly dressed, perfectly mannered and perfectly fed.

By what devilish, devious subtlety of the imagination, by what occult pulsing of the senses, hers and his in unison, had the fascination of the man seized her?

She trembled. She shuddered. The cold beads of perspiration stood upon her brow. But she could not dispel the thought. This was a man who had denied himself nothing. He had partaken of the banquet of life

and love whenever caprice had impelled or appetite had dictated; he had fathomed its depths, its every mystery, had steeped himself in its essence. And the knowledge he had gained had remained to abide with him forever, and because of all this, because of the omnipresence of his reminiscences, he had drawn over himself that cold, impassive, immobile mask.

What was this man's true character? As she asked herself the question, she caught his glance, travelling over her person slowly, devouringly. It seemed to disrobe her, to scorch her flesh. The desire to escape was almost uncontrollable.

Doctor Etheridge spoke, and the sound of his voice seemed to break the spell. She pulled herself together violently. He was telling her that Doctor von Dette was anxious to go over his various notes on nervous diseases, of which he made a specialty. As Miss Vaughn was the only nurse competent to take stenographic notes, and was also thoroughly familiar with Doctor Etheridge's memoranda, Doctor von Dette had requested that she be relieved from duty for a few mornings to assist him.

"That is," von Dette put in in his unnaturally soft, caressing voice, "if wholly agreeable to you."

Alice murmured her acquiescence. What else could she do? And all the while she felt these strangely luminous eyes gliding over her, enmeshing her, feasting upon her.

"If ever I fall ill, you must nurse me," said the Baroness. "Promise."

Alice promised.

"Meanwhile you must visit me, and if it is permitted, I shall call upon you."

They were gone at last, and Doctor Etheridge with

them. The girl was left alone. But there remained with her a keen, almost violent recollection of him in whose personality lurked the subtle poison which would corrode and disintegrate her power of resistance, which was, she felt sure, to cause her untold misery and anguish.

She realized her danger, and trembled. What could she do, how avert the peril that threatened? She could not run away. She had not even the inclination. She could no more help desiring to meet this man again than she could help breathing.

CHAPTER III

Ulrich von Dette, attired in a dark red velvet dressing robe, sat in a comfortable arm-chair, before an open blazing gas-log fire, smoking the cigarettes which served him as a night-cap. Incidentally he was thinking.

"I expect to be in New York four or five months at most," he said half-aloud. "The question is: How long will it take me to win her?"

He slid into a more comfortable position, one more conducive to hard thinking. Undoubtedly she was the most delicious thing he had ever seen. If he succeeded in winning her, it would make his stay in New York very much pleasanter than he had anticipated. He wondered whether she had ever had a lover. He thought not. If she had, it would of course facilitate his wooing; a week would suffice for the enactment of the prologue, for the little preliminary comedy of fine speeches and love-making which good taste and breeding required. He hoped she had not had a lover. It would be an incomparable experience to be the first to initiate so delicious a creature into the mysteries of love. He did not believe she had had a lover. There was about her something so girlish, so pristine, so maidenly. And this pale, slim girl was Diana-like. She was perfect! Yet who can read women? Even he had sometimes blundered.

His cigarette, burning down, scorched his finger. He flung it into the open fire, and lit another.

Sylvia had dropped a remark about Miss Vaughn's cleverness. Of course women had different notions from men of what constituted cleverness in women. Still he considered Sylvia a fair judge. The girl had struck him also as clever; Doctor Etheridge had praised her braininess. Possibly she was the type of woman who would develop her brain at the expense of her looks, and who, at forty, would be an authority on juvenile diseases and dress like a frump.

At all events, at present she was delicious, delectable. He thought of Shakespeare's words, "sport for Jove." But it was only her really remarkable beauty that made him think of these words. But he could not afford to become too deeply interested in her, since, in the course of events, he would have to terminate the affair four or five months hence.

It was possible that he would not succeed in winning her. American working women, that is, women of pure American stock, were notoriously chaste, very different from their self-supporting sisters of the Continent, who claimed a lover as one of their inalienable privileges in return for the burden of self-support. It was worth a trial, at any rate, and if he did not succeed, even a mere flirtation would afford him considerable pleasure and relaxation. He needed both; he had worked shockingly hard, like a galley-slave, ever since his arrival three weeks ago. He could not spare the time to take an active interest in sport, and moreover, while he was fond of horses and interested in aeronautics, there was no sport in the world comparable to the wooing and the winning of a woman. Nothing relaxed him so completely, and his nerves were really quite unstrung from the amount of work he had put in during the past three weeks. He was visiting the hospitals, and making notes

of all unusual cases, and he had performed as many as five operations in one day since his arrival, because all the hospitals, whose courtesies he had claimed and accepted, had asked him to perform at least one operation for the benefit of their medical staff.

He was only twenty-nine, but he had already made a name for himself in the medical world by the discovery of a fluid, which, when injected into the tissues and muscles surrounding the part to be operated upon immediately before the operation, had the effect of driving back the blood from the blood vessels of these parts, thereby enabling the surgeon to perform a bloodless operation. Considerable skill and judgment, however, were required in injecting the fluid, for if not enough were injected, the astringed veins and arteries would expand before the operation was completed, and considerable loss of blood would result, or if too much of the fluid were injected, the veins would remain sealed too long, and the flow of blood be retarded unduly.

This discovery of his, and his cultures of the pneumococcus on agar plates, had made him famous. Sometimes he regretted his rank. For months at a time he had devoted himself exclusively to science, impregnating himself with its spirit, and then suddenly he would feel the incubus of his rank, and at such times it was impossible for him to forget that he might some day be called upon to occupy a throne, and even if that possibility, which was remote, did not occur, it was a matter of months only before his grandfather, the present king, who was very feeble, would die, and he would be called upon to assume the regency for the future king, the present heir-apparent, who was a boy of eight. The name of Baron von Dette was of course only a medical incognito he employed when travelling.

He lit another cigarette. Would he succeed in winning this pretty nurse? The outcome was uncertain. Suddenly he remembered how the pupil of her eye had invaded the iris, changing the color of her eye from blue to black during the fraction of the moment in which he had held her glance. That made him more certain of success. He must have made some sort of an impression on her, and with young girls—she could not be more than twenty-one—first impressions were potent.

If he succeeded, he reflected that she had a reputation to lose. Doctor Etheridge had spoken very highly of her, and it would therefore not do to compromise her by going where either he or she might be recognized. A man of honor considered that it was incumbent upon a gentleman to safeguard in every possible way the reputation of a woman. He would have to secure an apartment. It would be wise to do this at once. The apartment would not be wholly wasted, at any rate, for if he did not succeed with her, he would have to find some one else. He reached for the memorandum pad on which he jotted down notes for his valet. Hahn had an impeccable taste and had acquitted himself creditably in delicate missions of the sort before. Hahn must find him an apartment to-morrow.

He threw away the cigarette end and reached for another. He found to his surprise that he had finished the entire box. He laughed. It occurred to him that, incredible though it was, he was actually a trifle in love with this pale, fragile girl whom he had seen that day for the first time. Certainly her face seemed to dance before his eyes in the bluish gas flames, and it seemed to assume expressions which he had not seen there. Perhaps his calculations were not quite as cold-blooded as he himself believed.

A good strategist, he opened his campaign the next day.

They had worked all morning over Doctor Etheridge's culture notes. Ulrich was amazed once or twice at the insight Alice evinced in forestalling his remarks, and in tendering whatever explanations were necessary. He said nothing to her until they had finished their morning's work. Then he said:

"You do your work admirably, Miss Vaughn. You have been well trained?"

"I assist Doctor Etheridge a good deal, as you have heard," she answered evasively. He noticed that she avoided looking at him.

"Do you lunch now?"

"No, not yet." She lifted her head, and this time she looked straight at him. Quickly she added: "We have an hour and a half for lunch and exercise. Before eating, I always go to the Park for a brisk walk."

"I am going in that direction," he said courteously. "May I drop you at the Park? My automobile is waiting."

She hesitated before answering, and the troubled look that came into her eyes did not escape him.

"It won't take me out of my way in the least," he urged, misunderstanding her hesitation.

A quick flush mounted to her brow. With ready tact he realized that she resented his assumption that he was offering to take her in order to please her, rather than himself.

"Thank you, I'll walk," she said coldly.

He felt a throbbing in his temples. Decidedly she was worth while. She understood fine *nuances*. Good! He would exert himself as he had never exerted himself before. He, breaker of hearts, known throughout Europe

for his success with women, would not fail here. She had mettle; all the better. He would show her what a finely-tempered, dominant, polished man was. He assumed his most ingratiating air; the little rivulets of light streamed freely forth from his eyes. His manner was almost a caress; his voice as intimate as a kiss.

"If you are going to walk, will you at least permit me to walk with you? I am somewhat downcast this morning about news I received from home, and I had hoped you would give me the pleasure of your company. There is nothing so cheering in the world as a brisk talk with a clever, congenial woman."

She looked at him, a trifle distrustfully, he thought. Again she avoided his eyes.

"I shall be glad to have you come with me," she said at length, in a voice devoid of all expression.

She went for her hat and coat, and when she came downstairs, he was waiting for her on the sidewalk beside his machine.

"Shall we ride or walk?" he asked gently. By some trick of the imagination, it seemed to her as if he had stood in that position waiting for her many times before, —as if they were old friends.

She shook off the lethargy that was threatening to entomb her, but she could find no voice to answer him. She shivered slightly.

"If we ride," he said coaxingly, "we shall have so much more time in the Park."

Without a word, she walked to the touring car. She felt him touch her elbow, as he helped her step into the car.

When they reached the Park, he asked her whether she would not just as soon ride through the Park as walk. It had been drizzling, and the pavements were

sticky and uninviting. The quick motion of the car had exhilarated her blood, and with a little toss of her head to shift her hat into position, she said:

"Let us ride, if it does not interfere with your schedule."

On the contrary, he assured her, she was doing a good deed. He lapsed into silence, and she stole a furtive glance at him. He was younger than she had at first thought. But the colossal reserve strength was all there, plainly visible in every lineament. He was really very handsome, very distinguished-looking, and with a little thrill of pleasure, she noted that his fur coat was real seal, and that the cap of sealskin which he wore had a jaunty turban-like appearance, giving his face a soft glow like a woman's.

She felt a sudden desire to bend over and kiss him. Then came a quick reaction. Seized with fright, she had the sensation of having been mad for a moment, and she was not quite sure that she had not been momentarily out of her mind and had not actually kissed him. She averted her face, and pressed her left arm against her wildly beating heart. Why had she come out with him? She had known when she saw him the first time that he was *the* man. Why did he not speak to her? European men did not wait for women to take the lead in conversation, but did most of the talking themselves. But he was waiting for her to say something. Never had she felt so green and callow and stupid. There was not a thing she could think of to say. Suddenly an idea seemed to float before her vision. She sighed.

"How long do you intend remaining in New York, Doctor?"

"It is curious, Miss Vaughn, I was just taking inventory of the time that remains. Three or four weeks at

most. And I have so many things to do in that time—one thing in particular.”

As he spoke the last phrase, he looked at her lingeringly in the gentle, languid, luxurious manner peculiar to him, and once more she was thrilled with fear. She wanted to ask: “What particular thing?” But she remembered that it would be a horribly ill-bred thing to do, and she suppressed the words, choked them down, swallowed them. Instead she said casually:

“You are a very busy man?”

“Yes, very.” And quite suddenly he leaned forward, over her, and a mad thought came into her head that he was about to embrace her. His face was within an inch of hers. It seemed to her that her respiration was suspended from terror and fright. He said:

“Pardon me, Miss Vaughn. You are entirely uncovered. I want to tuck that robe about you more securely.”

She thanked him, and he deftly tucked her in. She noticed the good breeding he displayed in not touching as much as her garment as he secured the lap-robe.

Back in the hospital at last, she flung herself face down upon her bed. An abyss of iniquity seemed to open before her. She knew that some of the nurses in the hospital allowed the men to kiss them, but since her school-days, when Ned had kissed her cheek—and he in those days had seemed like a brother—she had permitted no man to take any liberties. And yet she had felt an actual desire to kiss this man who was an utter stranger to her, this after she had connected him in thought with loose women. The shame of it! It seemed to her that she had fallen into a bottomless pit of turpitude. Then she thought of his handsome sealskin coat, the costly scarf pin he wore, his beautiful manners: She had never

seen any clothes hang quite as well upon a man as his did. She was thankful she had bought the pony-coat at Christmas. A hundred dollars had seemed a terrible price to pay for a garment, and she had thought that she looked like a millionaire's daughter in it. But his seal-skin coat now made her feel shabby and poor. She also decided to wear next day a white uniform with hand-embroidered cuffs and collar, but she suddenly recalled it was in the wash.

Ulrich von Dette was too much of an artist in love-making to repeat a ruse, no matter how successful. The next day he did not leave his machine at the door, nor did he ask permission to walk with her; but when Alice appeared on the steps, he was waiting for her, and he joined her as if it were the natural thing to do. She could not keep the look of pleasure out of her eyes when she saw him waiting for her. It was only after they had walked a block that he said:

"I hope you don't mind my coming along so uncere-
moniously. I enjoyed our talk so much yesterday."

Alice was in a more mischievous mood than the day before, and besides it was even nicer to go pacing down the street with him swinging alongside of her than to sit in a touring car with nothing to do but tilt one's face against the wind. So she said roguishly:

"If you really enjoyed our talk yesterday, Doctor, you must believe that intellectual silences make conversation, for I am sure we were both very silent."

"She is adorable," he thought. Taking the hint, he exerted himself to entertain her. He was a clever talker, neither frothy nor heavy, and as they fed the squirrels in the Park with peanuts, he spoke of various things. He asked her to go to the picture gallery in the Metropolitan Museum with him, and he was surprised

when she told him that she knew hardly any of the great paintings of the collection.

"Nature is so much nicer than Art can ever be," she explained, laughing to cover her confusion. "A real landscape, you must admit, is finer than any painter can represent it."

Then he explained to her that what made art valuable and dignified was not the mere counterfeit presentment of some real thing, but the temperament of the artist unconsciously revealed by him in handling his subject. And he cited the manner in which various masters had painted sunsets to illustrate his contention. Inness, he said, was dominated by the sheerly sensuous, perfectly sane beauty of dark-limbed, rough trees and a golden expanse of sky when he painted his famous canvas "Sunset at Montclair." Diaz rebelled against mere rioting in sensuous charm of full-throated color. He wanted the outlying trees in his innumerable forest scenes to speak of the super-sensuous, romantic suggestion of darkling lanes of trees approaching an open copse, where the sun sends down its blaze of golden radiance. Daubigny loved light and brightness, loved it unrelieved by shadows, but he never forgot that the sun which warms and dazzles also sucks up the vapory substances from the earth and the rivers to convert them into rain, and so we see all his landscapes robed in a dewiness, a moisture that is all his own and which no one else has portrayed because no one else had the genius to see it. What Blakeslock loved best at sunset was the violent contrast afforded by black-seeming leaves and branches silhouetted boldly and sharply against the sulphurous veil spread by the dying sun. Rousseau, too, loved this, but Rousseau was too comprehensive to allow his joy in a part to usurp his joy in the whole, and, therefore, where Blakeslock painted

only leaves or branches against a yellow sky, because he was too full of their beauty to have eyes for anything else, Rousseau painted an entire landscape, showed us the entire tree standing against a glow of golden-ramented heaven, but along the outskirts the gold was modulated to amber, and that fainter shade, that paler gold was a premonition that the cloth of gold spread like an arras behind the tree cannot last but must wane and disappear. And in introducing this note of prophecy, in suggesting the evanescence of the glory he has pictorially depicted, Rousseau has added and superimposed sublimity upon mere beauty. Monticulli saw in a sunset what he saw in everything else—rhythm primarily, rhythm of golden light, which, in fixing upon canvas, he transmuted into visible music. His figures of fine ladies and splendid gentlemen, of cherubs and children, of stately trees and statelier palaces, are depicted not because the artist considered them beautiful in themselves, but because only by these means, by graceful swish of dainty skirt, by languorous grace of bent knee, could he portray the rhythm which underlies all Nature and all Art, and which he loved so frantically. The pigment he used has not preserved the outline of his paintings. They are for the most part mere splotches of color, but so potent was this artist's personality, so complete his obsession by the idea which dominated him, that we can *feel* the pulsing of those bodies whose outlines are no longer distinguishable as they danced, or made love, or promenaded. And their insufficient preservation makes them more precious;—like the torsos of Greece, whose mutilated condition spurs the imagination not to mere futility of effort at restoration, but to the abiding conviction that nothing that we see in actual completion, no matter how beautiful, can be as flawless

and as perfect as these ancient statues of Greece must have been.

As for Corot, Ulrich said he was not quite certain, but he believed Corot had never done an actual sunset. Corot was eminently a lyric poet of the highest and finest order, and so drastically epic a subject as the fanfare of trumpets which attend a sunset would necessarily not have appealed to him, would perhaps have been resented by him as being a trifle *gauche*. Corot was a lyric poet with the delicacy of touch of a Keats or a Shelley, and certain topics he proscribed, being satisfied to suggest them as having recently occurred or as being about to occur. No painter, no poet, either, for that matter, had understood the marvellous potency of suggestion as Corot had done, or had understood so fully the true wizardry of brush and canvas and color as implements to conjure up a picture for the mind's eye rather than to paint it for the actual, physical vision.

At the end of this little impromptu lecture, he made her promise to come to the Museum with him some day. She promised. With the spell of his voice and of the marvellous reach of his imagination still upon her, she would have promised him more—much more.

As he walked back with her he said:

"We have only four more mornings' work before us, Miss Vaughn, that is all."

It had never occurred to her to answer that they had so far worked together only two. He had succeeded admirably in his intention of creating in her the impression of having known him indefinitely.

"Will you allow me to see you after we are through with our work?" he asked.

She smiled softly to hide the joy his question gave her.

"Why, yes, if you wish. If you have time."

"They allow you to receive visitors, don't they?"

"Yes, twice a week. Wednesdays and Sundays."

"Is that all? Then there's no help for it. I certainly cannot be content to see you only twice a week. You will have to call on me. Will you?"

She turned her head and looked him straight into his eyes. There was a query in her own that seemed to blind her against seeing him. He quailed a little.

"Baroness Sylvia has asked me to call on her also," she said quickly. "Would it be good form for me to call at the house without a further invitation?"

His heart exulted as he perceived that she was by far more clever than he had thought. He answered:

"I have taken an apartment further down town for myself. The house on Riverside Drive is so far up. It was my apartment that I referred to when I asked you to call. Sylvia will, of course, be delighted to see you at Riverside Drive."

He saw that her lips trembled, and for a moment he thought that she was about to cry. Her nervousness was apparent when she spoke.

"Doctor von Dette, I do not know, of course, what the custom is abroad. But here it is not considered the right thing for a young woman to visit a man's apartments."

"Oh, it's a bit unconventional, I admit," he replied easily. "But for two sensible persons, like you and I, both so deeply interested in science, it's all right, of course. I have some lovely pneumococcus cultures and a rabbit inoculated with a serum guaranteed to be a leprosy serum. You love rodents, you know."

"I don't love rodents at all," she retorted quickly. "And if I did, I would hardly want the poor things to

have leprosy foisted upon them. I do not know that I'm as much interested in science as you imagine."

He smiled as he answered:

"Perhaps you are a little more interested in me than I dare hope."

"I do not see the relevancy," she objected.

He put his hands in her arm, in answer, and walked along with her a few steps in that way.

"Please let go my arm," she protested. "We are walking along like Darby and Joan."

"I wish we were," he said insinuatingly.

"I don't," she retorted indifferently.

"Cruel!"

"Not at all!" she laughed. "Darby and Joan are always pictured as two old, shrivelled persons. It's much nicer to have all of life before us, to be young as we are, and tolerably good looking."

"Oh, thank you," he said with mock effusiveness.

Saucily, to cover her confusion at having paid him a part compliment, she replied:

"I said 'tolerably.'"

He laughed.

"Alice," he murmured, "you are awfully nice."

"You must not call me Alice," she protested.

He mimicked her manner.

"You must not correct me so much."

They both laughed.

"Alice," he said, "will you allow me to kiss you?"

Some quality of his voice or eyes or both went to her head. She seemed suffused, bathed in sweet lassitude. Hardly knowing what she said, she answered:

"I do not know whether I will allow you to kiss me or not. But I am quite sure that whether or not you have my permission, you are going to kiss me."

"You are adorable," he said in an earnest, rhapsodical sort of way. "If we were not on the street I would kiss you now."

"Then it is well that we are on the street."

"Don't be cruel—don't say you're glad of it."

"I didn't say I was glad of it. But I am."

He caught her hand in his, and pressed it.

"No, Alice, you are not."

"You must not say such things to me. Please let go my hand."

"Will you not come to see me at seven o'clock to-night? Here, I am slipping my address into your muff."

She shook it out of her muff, as if the card meant contamination. It fell upon the pavement.

"I didn't mean to throw it down," she said gently. "But I don't want the address. Release my hand, please."

He obeyed her and picked up the card.

"Alice," he said earnestly, "I am very much in love with you."

"How can that be?" she said banteringly. "You have known me just a week."

"Ask yourself how such things are possible. You are quite as much in love with me, as I am with you."

"I am not," she said. There was a ring of defiance in her voice.

"More so, perhaps," he suggested pleasantly. "Is that what you mean?"

She became angry, blindly angry. She knew he spoke the truth. She wanted to say something to hurt him bitterly, but she could think of nothing. He said again in the same low, caressing tone as before:

"Alice, will you come and see me at seven?"

"No, I will not. You must understand, Doctor von Dette, that I am not that sort of girl."

"What sort of a girl?" he demanded, raising his eyebrows, as if not understanding.

"The sort of girl who calls on a man," she said limply. He saw that he was gradually undermining her self-possession.

"I really cannot see why you should feel as you do about it," he said, assuming a tone that was all innocence and honey. "If you should decide to come, we shall have a nice little supper—no wine, of course. That would be improper for two young people alone; and after supper I will show you my cultures—they really are beauties—and if you play, you will be good enough to play something for me. And then we will sit and talk till it is time for you to go home. And that is all—quite all."

She lowered her head, and bringing her muff up to her chin, looked at him searchingly. He thought she was entirely grave and serious, until he saw a quiver of suppressed merriment at the corners of her mouth.

"And are you quite sure, Doctor, that you will not even kiss me?"

"Would you be very much disappointed if I didn't?"

He expected her to show blind anger as before, but she merely caught her breath, closed her eyes for one brief instant, and brought her teeth together with a sharp click. He wondered whether she wished that she had his shoulder or his cheek between her teeth. She was probably a good deal more passionate than he had imagined.

"Doctor von Dette," she said in a smooth voice, that set every fibre in him vibrating, "you know very well, and I know it, too, that if I came to your rooms you would kiss me, and that I would come in expectation of your kisses."

"Yes, I am quite sure of that," he said easily, "but if I were to tell you all I am sure of, you'd be very angry, I'm afraid."

"What do you mean?" she demanded, indignant again.

"You know very well what I mean," he replied cryptically. He had not the remotest notion himself what he meant. But phrases such as these he had always found very efficient; very useful in similar cases. To worry and torment a woman until she does not know in what direction to turn, until weary to death from opposing her will against the man's, she succumbs and yields—that, as he knew, was the best policy to pursue.

"Good-bye," she said coldly.

He lifted his hat.

"*Auf Wiedersehen*," he said amiably. "Till to-morrow morning."

That night she was late in getting to bed. Her hand-embroidered uniform had come up from the laundry, and she sat for upwards of an hour before retiring, thinking about the advisability of wearing it. Of course he would know that she had put it on especially for his sake, and so would everybody else; but, on the other hand, she felt very much more at ease when perfectly costumed, and she expected to be very nervous with him the next day. She fell asleep finally, having decided that she would not wear the embroidered gown, and feeling quite certain that she would.

As she had anticipated, she was very nervous the next day, and made many and foolish blunders, each one of which he took pleasure in pointing out to her, explaining the error in a half pitying, half patient way that exasperated her.

When they were through with the work, he said:

"I have my car downstairs. I am not going anywhere

in particular this afternoon. If you like, we can go for a quick spin up Riverside Drive. I will let the machine go, and we can be back by one o'clock. What say you?"

She declined politely but firmly.

"Oh, come now," he said in an off-hand, drawing-room manner, "don't be foolish, please. What's the use of feeling like this? I'll behave myself, I will really. You must admit I've been admirable this morning."

"Yes, you have."

"There, that's nice of you, Miss Vaughn. Please don't refuse to come with me. Don't spoil the first free afternoon I've had in a month."

It was really a shame to see him so put out, but she could not resist parrying a while longer. It was so sweet to see him beg.

"You're a very dangerous man," she said.

"Dangerous! What a word! Dangerous! You can't possibly suppose that I intend kidnapping you for the purpose of inoculating you with leprosy serum or making cultures on you!"

He was irresistible. She could not help laughing.

"I wish you'd stop talking about your silly cultures."

"Hush, my dear," he said in a paternal way, "the cultures of the famous Doctor von Dette are no more silly than he is."

"Sometimes I'm afraid the famous Doctor von Dette is very silly."

"About you, Alice—only about you."

"You really must stop calling me by my first name."

"You can revenge yourself easily. My first name is Ulrich."

She tried not to smile.

"I really think you had better go without me to-day, Doctor."

"Alice, please, please come. Really, my dear, you will make me profoundly unhappy if you don't. Look here, don't take everything I say so seriously. As you so succinctly remarked, I am at times, rather silly."

She was beginning to thaw visibly.

"Alice," he begged, "why waste time so wantonly? Ten minutes gone with our bickering."

"I'll hurry," she said.

He had no chauffeur with him that day. He had a speedy machine, painted white, which she had not seen before, and he "let her go," as he had promised. The touring car lurched and swung and rolled onward at a pace that violated all speed ordinances. It sent the boisterous April wind whizzing about their ears like a buzz-saw.

Alice closed her eyes and gave herself over to the delight of flying along. Presently a strange, semi-somnambulant feeling came over her. She felt as if she were falling asleep, and she thought that it must be very sweet to pillow her head against the strong, seal-skin clad shoulder of the strong man beside her. She seemed to lose track of time. Suddenly she opened her eyes with a start. They were flying along over open country, the river sparkling to the left like a diamond-strewn silver shield. She exclaimed in surprise:

"Where are we?"

He did not reply to her question, but said:

"Did you enjoy your nap?"

"I believe I did have a nap—just a cat-nap. Where are we?"

"Somewhere near Two-hundredth street, beyond University Heights."

"What time is it?" she cried in alarm. "We must have been out over an hour."

He assented.

"I am sorry. I forgot you had to be back by one. I thought you were asleep, and I did not wish to waken you by turning the machine."

"Please turn it now."

He did so immediately. They had the wind against them now. It was a raw April day, more reminiscent of February than prophetic of May, and the wind from the river cut their faces like sleet.

He slackened the speed.

"Have you no veil?" he asked.

"No."

There was a queer looking little house a quarter of a mile off, and as the distance diminished, they saw that it was a combination pin and needle and grocery store.

"Perhaps we can get a veil for you there," he said. "Your face will be cruelly chapped unless you put something over it to protect it."

"I have no money with me," she said in an awkward, subdued way.

He did not reply, but she saw him pull out a bill. She thought he was going to hand it to her, and she intended thanking him for lending her the money. But he did not hand it to her, and when a girl of fourteen or fifteen came running out of the store when the car stopped, he said to the girl:

"Have you any veiling?"

"Only white or dark blue."

"Which do you want, Alice?" he asked in a matter-of-fact way, and she felt her heart give a queer little leap as if it meant to jump into her mouth, for the tone he employed was the tone in which a man addresses his wife.

"The blue will do," she replied, trying to speak smoothly. When the girl brought the veiling, she took it and

wound it about her head, her cheeks. She saw him slip the change into his pocket without looking at it, and suddenly a feeling of acute terror and bewilderment came over her, for she realized his mastery of her, and realized furthermore than she liked it. And then she remembered that he had paid for the veil, and that she had accepted it as if it were a gift and not a loan. This troubled her greatly, but try as she would, she could think of no way in which to tell him that she meant to reimburse him. What quality, she wondered, was it that reduced her to such imbecility, such limpness in his presence?

The veil afforded her face some protection, but not much, and the wind seemed a perfect gale. "I am sorry I brought you so far," he said once. "I hope you will not take cold. I should reproach myself utterly if you were to fall ill."

"I sha'n't take cold," she said. "It's only my face that bothers me."

"Try and put your head back of my shoulder," he said. He tilted forward a little. "Try."

"No, no," she said.

"Don't be foolish, Alice," he said. "There is no one here to see, and if there were, we are going along so quickly that no one could possibly recognize us."

She held out for another minute, but the wind seemed to be splitting her skin, to be flaying her. With a quick little gesture, she placed her head where he had indicated, and was amazed at the warmth which she obtained from his coat.

"How deliciously warm that fur is!" she said.

"Do you like sealskin?"

"Yes, I love it. I think there is no fur more beautiful."

She lifted her face. She could not take her eyes off

the beautiful sealskin. The wind, blowing roughly against it, made little ripples in the fur, revealing the length and fineness and exquisite shading of the individual hairs.

"Alice, will you allow me to give you a sealskin coat?"

"Certainly not."

"Why not?"

"Oh, for one thing," she replied banteringly, "it's the end of the season. Summer will be here in a month. May with us means the coolest muslins we can get."

"Have you then no cold storage in New York?"

She ignored this.

"Oh," she continued, "it will be old-fashioned next year."

"Only negligibly so," he replied seriously. "Styles change very little in fur garments. I should dearly love to give you a sealskin coat to remember me by when I am gone."

She gave him a frightened little look, which, although he was not looking at her, he perceived with joy.

"Won't you, dear?"

"No, no. It's quite out of the question, Doctor."

"As an appreciation of the work you did for me?"

"The hospital pays for my services. You are indebted to the hospital, not to me."

"That's all very well. But you've made things very pleasant for me. Look here, you'd let me send you flowers, wouldn't you?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so."

"And candy?"

"Yes."

"That's fortunate. I've just sent you a five-pound box of chocolates."

"I love them. Thank you so much."

"Now I could easily spend quite as much as a sealskin coat would come to for flowers and candy within a month, and according to your own admission, you would think it proper. Then why not the coat?"

"Oh," she replied wearily, "the one is proper and the other isn't. That's all."

"Don't you think that for a brainy woman your reasoning in this instance is very poor?"

"If I'm to argue with you," she said, "I shall have to first warm my poor brains against your shoulder. The wind is evaporating them."

"Go ahead."

But she merely held her muff before her face for a moment, and then said triumphantly:

"I'll tell you why convention allows a woman to accept flowers and sweetmeats from a man, and not clothes. Luxuries, flowers, etc., make life pleasant, but we can get along without them. After all, to accept luxuries from any one means a trifling obligation only. But for a woman to be indebted to a man for the necessities of life would be intolerable."

"Unless she loved him," he said quietly, and turned and looked at her. "Also, I perceive I had an erroneous notion in my head, in classing sealskin coats as luxuries. You tell me they are necessities. Would a day laborer, earning nine dollars a week, I wonder, agree with you?"

She laughed. The wind was a legitimate excuse for not continuing the argument. The outskirts of the city were springing up on either side of them. The sky line across the river showed ocean-going vessels and ferry boats. To the other side, sky-scraping apartment houses reared themselves in towering isolation.

"It will be long after two when we get back to the hospital," he said. "Couldn't I telephone, and make some excuse, so we can get something to eat together?"

"I don't think I ought to lunch with you, Doctor."

"Please do. Just a bite. You must be famished. I am. If you refuse, I shall think you are angry because of the sealskin coat."

"Don't think that. I've forgotten about it. But I cannot lunch with you. For one thing, I am not dressed for a restaurant. I am in uniform."

She was frightened after she had spoken, fearing he might renew his solicitations to have her come to his rooms, under the pretext of lunching there. But Ulrich von Dette was much too clever to avail himself of so direct an opening, or to put himself in the wrong by tacitly admitting that he had not observed whether she was properly gowned or not. He said:

"Your uniform is very charming. And it looks more like a simply made summer gown than a uniform because of the embroidered collar and cuffs. You must have bought the embroidery in France."

"No. I did the embroidery myself."

"Really? Think of it! I imagined you incapable of so purely feminine an occupation as embroidery."

In her delight at his having thought of her so circumstantially, she did not resent the injustice he had done her. She said:

"Do I seem so very unfeminine to you?"

"No, of course not," craftily he feigned hesitation. "A little too insistently brainy, that is all."

She did not reply, but this imputation she resented, for she knew that she made no pretensions to braininess, and that it was he, and not she, who was continually harping upon it. But she had little time to nurse her injury, for

he had stopped at a telephone station, and made her come into the store with him to superintend the message.

"Whom shall I ask for, Doctor Etheridge or that bear of a head-nurse?"

"Ask for Doctor Etheridge, and if he is not there, ask for Miss Bell. And I hope to goodness he is out, for the bear of a head-nurse, as you call her, will be much nicer about it than he."

"What shall I say? That I took you up home to show you some cultures, and my cousin kept you for lunch?"

"No. Please tell the truth."

"Your New England conscience is a very obstreperous instrument, I am afraid, if it balks at so trifling a fib as the one I proposed."

"It isn't my New England conscience at all," she retorted with spirit, "but my New York common-sense, which tells me there is no rhyme or reason in concocting a falsehood when the truth will serve as well."

After she had spoken she was amazed at her lack of single-mindedness, and she became troubled. For the second time since she knew him, it seemed that some woman whom she did not know, who was a stranger to her, had invaded her soul and was sharing it with her, and was using her lips as a mouthpiece to enunciate things which she herself had no intention whatever of saying.

He looked at her in surprise.

"Do you know," he said, and he was sincere for once, "you are really an uncommonly clever woman." And while he held the receiver to his ear, waiting for the connection, he reflected that it would be a good deal more difficult to win her than he had expected. She was so damnably clear-headed.

They lunched in the grill-room of the Knickerbocker,

and as she left the selection to him, he chose terrapin ragout and brook trout fried in olive oil. To evince his hospitable intentions, he asked her, as a matter of form, whether she cared for a cocktail or wine, and accepted her "neither" without comment. She liked him for the unobtrusive way in which he allowed the episode to slip away. She thought it showed his breeding, which was so conspicuous a factor in his make-up, to magnificent advantage.

She looked at him, her admiration as plainly legible in her eyes as a visiting card is visible on a silver salver. She recollected herself, and removed her gaze.

A woman wearing bizarre curls over her ears, and grotesquely attired, entered with two men, and everybody stared.

"An actress?" she murmured.

"Undoubtedly she poses as such," he said dryly. Then he leaned forward, and his whole manner, his eyes, his extended hands, with their palpable, trembling shadows of dark hair, lying clasped upon the table, seemed to say, "Let us not think of any one but ourselves."

But his eyes, with the strange rivulets of light inundating them, troubled her exceedingly. She remembered how her face had lain against his shoulder in the automobile, and she reflected that, side by side with him, she had not seemed so close to him as now, when they were sitting on opposite sides of the table, with his eyes piercing hers.

The waiter came and spoke to him a few times, and brought them bread and butter and helped them to water, and von Dette pointed out to her the mural decorations which he said were worth looking at. But it seemed to her as if there were a great deal of hustle and confusion

about them, and as if it were impossible to enter into a real conversation.

But she felt a strange, inexplicable sensation of physical nearness to him, as if his arms were about her, or as if his lips had touched her cheek, and she wondered whether it was a feeling of this sort that made him ask to kiss her. She became a little dizzy. Besides this, her face was burning horribly from the wind, and she was afraid she looked frightful.

"My face is crimson, I am sure."

"Is it painful?"

"Rather."

He drew a small phial from his pocket and handed it to her. It contained a milky fluid.

"It's a harmless face lotion," he explained. "Pour a little over the corner of your handkerchief, and moisten your face with it. No one will notice it."

"What a remarkable thing for a man to carry!"

Bowing formally, he answered:

"I carry it solely for the use of my friends."

His words aroused an unaccountable resentment in her, and she felt a sudden desire to snub him. But she said nothing. With smiling face and anger in her heart, she listened to his conversation.

The food was brought. But although the terrapin was delicious, she did not enjoy it. The wind and the ride had made her very tired, and she still seemed to feel the rocking motion of the car, she still seemed to feel her face against his shoulder. Her color had died away at last, and she was so tired that she knew there must be deep circles under her eyes.

"Are you very tired, Alice?"

"Desperately."

"Can you lie down and take a nap when you get back to the hospital?"

"I can hardly do that. I think I will be in time for Doctor Etheridge's lecture. He is very particular to have no medical student absent without sufficient reason."

Her voice sounded weary and fagged, and he noted with joy unutterable that she spoke of attending the lecture as of a duty to be performed, not of a pleasure to be enjoyed. "The poison is beginning to work," he thought.

As they passed through the lobby of the hotel, she glanced at the dim recess of a curtained-off corner.

"How inviting those chairs look," she remarked.

"Let us sit here quietly for a few moments."

She acquiesced immediately. When they were seated he said impulsively: "Alice, won't you come to my rooms, dear? Now, don't be angry, sweetheart, but——"

"Doctor von Dette," she interrupted him, "it is bad enough to have you call me by my first name, but I positively forbid you to call me sweetheart."

"I will call you sweetheart, nevertheless. Two days ago you forbade me to call you Alice. To-day you allow it. A week hence you will be quite willing to have me say 'sweetheart.' Yes, you will. My calling you 'sweetheart' does not make you my sweetheart, does it? Although I wish it did," he added under his breath.

She sighed wearily. The incessant vigilance of this man was beginning to weary her inutterably. It brought to her mind a short story of Jack London's she had read, in which a wolf and a man, both dying of starvation, dragged themselves over miles and miles of desolate country, both in the hope that the other would relax his

vigilance and give himself a chance to kill, and after killing, to eat, and by eating to restore his own depleted energies.

To her excited imagination it suddenly seemed that this man at her side, so well-groomed, so attentive, so high-bred, so charming, so witty, was nevertheless a beast of prey, waiting only to see her stumble and hesitate, to relax her attention, so that he, too, might strike—after his fashion. The only wonder was that she did not hate him, and yet, strange to say, she did not. But she decided suddenly that she would never accept the least attention from him again.

He seemed to read her thoughts, for he said:

"Alice, don't be angry with me; you look so wretchedly fagged, and I reproach myself so bitterly for taking you on that cold drive. Come to my rooms. You can lie down quietly; nothing and nobody will disturb you. I have a large, broad leather couch, as comfortable as the softest bed, and I will cover you with a lovely, hand-knitted Afghan of Angora wool, and then I will draw the shades, and then, if you will permit it, I will kiss your hand, and if you will not permit that, I will kiss your sleeve, your slipper, and then you will sleep, and when you awake, you will have a cup of tea before I drive you home. Yes?"

"No, no," she said almost roughly. She felt as if she were protecting herself against a physical assault. The softness, the ingratiating quality of his voice, was almost more than her tortured nerves could bear. And then the horrible sensation of physical nearness to him which had not left her for a moment since they had sat down at table together. "No, no," she repeated more feebly, as he continued to gaze at her.

He persisted.

"Come, Alice, come and pay your first call to-day—now."

"No—Ulrich."

She added his name, using it for the first time, in full cognizance of what she was doing. But it seemed to have been forced from her. She had not wanted to say "Ulrich," but she had said it.

"Alice, sweetheart——"

"Please, please, don't ask me again." Her eyes filled with tears, which did not fall, but hung betwixt cheek and eyelid, like dewdrops, he thought, between blades of grass, where the growth is heavy.

Something like pity stirred in him. He saw her terror, her vain, pitiful striving to control herself. He knew that it rested with him solely whether she would lie in his arms within the hour or not. Was pity then stronger than passion? He had never found it to be so before. Yet it was beyond his power to take advantage of her at this moment. She would hate him for it. Perhaps, strange though it seemed, he would hate himself. She seemed such a young, helpless, babyish thing to take her thus to his rooms.

To check his own nervousness, he arose and looked at the clock. It was almost four. If she came home with him, it would be seven at least before she could get back to the hospital, and then her agitation and the unusual hour would probably betray her. So it was settled for him, and to his surprise, he found that this consideration, which made it impossible for him to take her to his rooms, relieved his mind enormously.

He must prepare her a while longer. He could not bear the thought that she should learn to hate him. It was the first time that any thought of this kind had de-

tered him from rushing headlong to his pleasure. Was it then possible that he was actually falling in love with this girl? Was his love for her something sweeter, holier than he had ever experienced before?

Holier? Could love between man and woman ever be holy or sacred? He doubted it. To his mind, love between the sexes was purely earthy and of the earth. And yet—there sat the girl whom he desired as fully, if not more poignantly, than he had ever desired a woman, and he was not pressing to the uttermost the advantage he had won. It was very puzzling.

He turned to look at the object that had brought about this queer state of mind. He felt a sudden wish to regard her impartially, with curiosity and intelligence unhampered by the emotions. She sat where she had sat before, her cheek resting lightly upon one small gloved hand. Her tears had fallen at last; they were thick and heavy like a child's, and midway down her cheek their course had been checked.

"Gad," he muttered. "She is beautiful!" His right hand sought his throat, fumbled at his collar, as if to give him air, compromised finally upon caressing his chin, while his elbow rested in the palm of his other hand.

"She might serve as a model for an angel weeping," he thought. Other women, indulging immoderately in tears, became repulsive or ludicrous, but she, weeping modestly, unobtrusively, was adorable and perfect as always.

Undoubtedly it would be an act of vandalism to follow up his advantage now. Who would tear open a rose-bud forcefully, in order to prematurely produce a rose? A ruined bud, a blighted flower, would be the upshot. The wise man, the poet, would be content to wait, saying, "In a little while the sun and the rain and the wind will coax

the bud to open by itself, and by itself to reveal its full splendor as a mature rose." Meanwhile, how sweet was the bud!

How now to relieve the situation? He came and sat down opposite to her.

"Alice," he said soothingly, "you may not know it, but a man's shoulder is admirably adapted for a good cry. May I offer you mine?"

"I've not been crying," she said, with a little snifle.

"No?" He carefully dried her face with his handkerchief. She offered no protest.

"What are these?" he asked, "if not tears?"

"My eyes may have watered a bit, from the wind," she answered.

"I see," he retorted. "Do you want to go home, dear—to the hospital?"

She arose, without a word, and as they walked through the lobby together, she slipped her hand through his arm.

Surprised and pleased, he looked down at her.


"It's only because of the soft sealskin," she said roguishly.

"Happy sealskin," he sighed comically. Together they passed out into the street.

That evening, as Ulrich sat smoking his cigarettes before retiring, he found to his relief that, away from the spell of her personality, his cynicism had returned to him in large measure.

"To-morrow," he promised himself, "I shall employ more flesh-tints. To-morrow I shall tighten the thumbscrews."

But he did not relish the thought of applying the thumbscrews. His cynicism was not as firm as he would have liked it to be.



CHAPTER IV

When Ulrich entered the library the next morning, he enveloped Alice in a look that no woman could misunderstand. Yet he greeted her with politeness, and evinced his desire to get to work at once. There was an aloofness, a detachedness about him that seemed to signify utter indifference, and but for the glints of light that came into his eyes whenever they alighted upon her, he in no way showed the faintest interest in her.

She had braced herself, before coming to the library, against any allurements and blandishments with which he might renew his attempts. She had spent a miserable night of self-loathing and abasement, following one of those revulsions of feeling from which those in love are never exempt. She had made a dozen laudable resolutions, and because she had expected to find opposition, immediate and strong, levelled against her determination, his coldness and reserve and apparent indifference were a worse shock to her nerves than would have been the most impassioned wooing.

When they had finished, he began, in the tone of an utter stranger, complimenting her upon her ability, her cleverness. And he addressed her respectfully as "Miss Vaughn." She thanked him coldly. She had desired him to abstain from use of her Christian name, but now that he complied with her wish, she was mortified beyond measure. His tribute to her intellect also annoyed and angered her unaccountably. His whole manner filled her with resentment.

"But in spite of your braininess," he continued, speaking in the languid, lazy tone which was habitual with him, excepting when he spoke with brother-savants or with her, "you should abandon nursing. You are too good looking to come into continual contact with sickness and death."

She remembered a similar remark made by the Baroness.

"No one is too good looking to alleviate suffering," she replied, falling in with the distant manner which he employed.

"Very prettily answered, and to be expected, since you are an Anglo-Saxon. But I am a Continental, and the continental code says that pretty women shall enjoy—and be enjoyed."

Alice said nothing. The blood was beating violently in her temples. Oh, she should have hated him, hated him, as she should have hated him before, but she could muster no hatred to hurl against him. He spoke again.

"Why," he asked, "did you think that I meant that? Beautiful women are enjoyed in many ways besides the original brutal one. Their beauty is an embellishment upon a bleak world. A truly beautiful woman is a greater masterpiece than the finest achievement in painting or music or literature. And, like a masterpiece of art, she stimulates the most extravagant enthusiasm in the *connoisseur*. A homely woman has an excuse for cultivating her brain, in desiring to attain mental distinction. She cannot conquer men, so she will compete with them. Very good. But a beautiful woman lacks the one valid excuse. Physical vanity is the normal emotion of women, mental vanity of men, and the woman who arrogates mental vanity to herself is as great a mon-

strosity as a man who cultivates physical vanity is an absurdity.

"That," he went on, "is the eternal difference, insurmountable and abiding, between the sexes. The one should excel in beauty, the other in strength, for in these latter days, brains and strength are, if not synonymous terms, at least levers of synonymous possibilities. Therefore, the wisest man in the world can be fascinated by the most stupid of women, so long as she is lovely to look at, and conversely, the most beautiful woman can be subjugated by the most repulsive of men, so he be endowed with exceptional strength or exceptional cleverness."

He spoke in his usual languid way, his eyes sending forth their strange flashes of flame which seemed to stab her flesh, his voice exuding fine tendrils of emotion, which, like tangible filaments, enmeshed and caressed and wrapped themselves about her senses.

He leaned across the table, and laid his hand beside hers, without touching it. She experienced a sensation of suffocation. She thought of flight, but a feeling of weakness, which she could not overcome, made flight impossible.

"Don't be afraid," he said tenderly. He spoke in low, even tones, but there was a curious tremolo in his voice that she had never noted before, and to which every nerve in her body responded. "I shall not kiss you. I shall not even touch you, for if I did, it would be too much or not enough." Suddenly his voice broke, became thick and hoarse. They were aliens no longer. Their footing of the day before was more than restored. "I love you, Alice," he cried passionately, "I have only known you a week. Can you, who are innocent of all knowledge, who never tasted the joys of love, realize

what violence I have been doing myself all week—yesterday, to-day—in sitting beside you, stupidly inactive, instead of crushing you in my arms, and making you respond?”

“I wouldn’t respond,” she flung out desperately, but she was trembling from head to foot.

He laughed. “Do not dare me,” he said. “Do not speak again. I am a different man to-day than you have yet seen. Your voice intoxicates me, your eyes make me delirious, and your hair is like the strands of a spider’s web—fine as silk, apparently as easily broken, yet in truth a net of incredible strength, of insidious possibilities—capable of strangling a man, of God knows what else.”

“You are mad!”

“Who wouldn’t be?” he retorted with spirit. His voice lost its harshness, became liquid and caressing. It seemed to the girl that he must be kissing the words before emitting them, they were so soft, so smooth, so seductive. He took her hand. “Alice, you are the loveliest woman I have ever seen, and I love you, I want you, I desire you.”

She put up her hand as if to wave away the words that sounded to her like a magician’s invocation. Quick as lightning, he shot both of his hands over to her. She thought that he would at last take her in his arms and kiss her. The thought terrified and yet delighted her. She did not move. He seemed to paralyze alike her volition and her muscles. But when his hands were within half an inch of her, he drew them back quickly.

“I have promised,” he said, “not to touch you.”

He spoke as a man who makes a supreme effort, and there had entered into his voice, which had regained its liquid clearness, an element akin to the flame in his eye.

"You said I was a dangerous man the other day," he said. "It is true—to-day I am very dangerous."

Alice spent a miserable afternoon. He had succeeded in doing what he wanted to do. He had completely checkmated her. The display of inordinate passion he had made flattered her vanity, and the apparent self-control he had exercised in banishing his passion gave her a high notion of the regard he entertained for her virtue. Both were as he had intended. Nevertheless, she was more alarmed than she had been at any time since their acquaintance began.

"Is it possible," she thought, "that I do not trust myself?"

The thought occurred to her of feigning indisposition the next day, so as to avoid him, but when morning came, after a troubled night, she concluded that to do so would be to declare herself vanquished. Her pride rebelled. She would meet him, and show she was perfectly self-possessed. She would look at his well-manicured fingers, and his hand with its penumbra of black hair, and then she would hate him. His hands were beautiful, but she did not like them. Yes, she would hate him. She would always remember to look at his hands when she felt that love was getting the better of her.

Pale, weary, trembling with the strange, new sensation, she presented herself in the library at the accustomed hour.

Von Dette was there alone. She had hoped, and again she had feared, that some one else might be there. She was surprised that she felt a sensation of relief on finding only him. Was it possible that she longed for a continuation of the adventure?

He did not speak as she entered, but raised his eyes from the book he was reading, and it seemed to her that

they gleamed phosphorescently. Some of his icy reserve was gone. The volcano was nearer the surface, still in leash, it is true, but very apparent.

He did not reply to her "good morning," but motioned to her to take a chair. To her surprise she became more tranquil on seeing his emotion. His agitation had dispelled her own.

They worked in silence for an hour. Suddenly, as she leaned forward to arrange some papers, she caught sight of his waxen, ridiculously white fingers, the pulpy white hand with its covering of black hair. She had forgotten her intention not to lose sight of his hands, that she might loathe him. But when suddenly confronted by them, she experienced none of the hostility which she had made herself believe they would induce in her. Instead, a torrential wave of emotion swept over her with inconceivable swiftness. She hated him at that moment, but it was not the kind of hatred she had wished to feel.

Once, through a defective fountain pen, he stained his fingers with ink. He excused himself, and washed his hands in the wash basin in a corner of the room. When he returned, he was still rubbing his hands, one with the other. He stood before her, regarding her fixedly, whether deliberately or abstractedly, she could not say, and all the while he rubbed his hands together vigorously, to keep them from chapping. There was a peculiar, self-satisfied smile on his lips, in which there lurked something of cruelty or triumph, or both. A nameless terror came racing over her. She looked away from him, and attempted to fix her attention on a book, but though she sought to keep her eyes away from his cynical smile, they were drawn back in some strange way, as if some unseen hand were lifting her head, and tilting it

back, and drawing the very vision out of her eyes in a direction contrary to that in which she chose to look. He stood there in the same attitude as before, still rubbing his pink, baby-soft palms together, regarding her with his inscrutable smile, in which the look of sensual triumph had deepened, to which there was added another quality, as of utter pitilessness, which had not been there before. In her own eyes was an appealing look, as if begging for mercy.

She wondered obscurely whether he had any notion of the agony he was inflicting. It seemed to her that he could not know. Suddenly it appeared to her that this wave of emotion which was undulating through her was a monstrous thing.

She did not know that every gesture, every glance, every word, every movement, the very intonation and cadence in his voice, was premeditated, and as fully controlled and directed as the words he spoke. She did not know that he was playing upon her emotionalism as a musician plays upon an instrument whose every chord he knows, that he was manipulating her senses with the terrible, unerring certainty of a man whose experience has been with dozens, with scores, perhaps with hundreds, of women, and who, because of that experience which had been always purely of the senses and therefore unblinded by affection, or even of sympathy, was able to appraise women with the unfailing insight evinced by a horse-dealer in the purchase of a horse, by an art-lover in the acquisition of a new painting. Ulrich von Dette was a *connoisseur* of women; he not only knew how to appraise them, he knew how to break them of their opposition to his will, of their security, almost of their individuality, and all that with the same good-natured ease, the indifferent nonchalance with which a sportsman

breaks a high-spirited horse, giving the line only to more effectively assert his own mastery in the end.

Later on, as she was turning a leaf, her hand remaining in the air between him and herself for a moment, he, without warning, caught it in his own, crushing it to his lips, kissing passionately the tips of her fingers.

"You had promised not to," she said gently.

She was aware that her voice also held a new note.

"When did I make so foolish a promise?" he demanded.

"Yesterday."

She withdrew her fingers from his grasp. They were bruised and sore from the energy of his lips.

"Yesterday?" He wrinkled his brow as if in futile recollection. "Yesterday is a century ago, for a night interposed between yesterday and to-day, a night—without you."

"Hush!" She was amazed that she did not resent this insult. But her voice was beyond her control. It was soft as the cooing of a mating bird.

"My darling," he went on with sudden tenderness and very gently, "my darling, to-morrow is Sunday, and you are free. Let us go into the woods together in the morning. We'll have dinner there, just you and I, and then—we'll roam through the woods again."

"No, no!" she cried.

"Sweetheart," he said caressingly, "don't think evil of me. There is none in my mind. Surely there is no harm in our going to the woods together, where we can pick violets and daffodils. I will show you a beautiful mansion—such a mansion and such a park!"

"I will not go with you," she answered determinedly.

"Do you already love me so much?" he laughed.

She became angry, but he laughed again, and bending over, kissed her between the eyes.

"Dearest," he said, "what else can I say? What else can be the reason of your refusal? Either you refuse because you love me and fear me; or you love me so much that an innocent day with me would bring you no joy."

He saw by her eyes that she was perplexed, and before she could resist him, he had kissed her again and again on the brow, on the eyes, imparting such delicacy, such tenderness, such reverence almost to his blandishments that Alice became more and more demoralized.

"Forgive me, love," he went on feverishly. "You did not understand what I meant. Forgive me, love. I was a brute to say it. You will come with me to-morrow, won't you?"

"I will not go," she repeated lamely, feeling herself weaken under his persistence.

"Yes, you will," he said softly. "I will be here for you at ten o'clock. We will spend an ideal day. It shall mark the betrothal of our souls, and upon it shall fall no evil."

Again she murmured her protests, but he only put his arm about her chair, and leaned closer to her, so closely, that the breath of his lips stirred on hers.

"Dearest," he asked, "why not?"

She strove to speak with vehemence:

"You have not treated me in the right way, not——"

"Like a gentleman?" he queried gently.

She said nothing, but the tears of mortification stood in her eyes.

He took her by the shoulders and gazed down at her, an amused smile playing about his lips.

"Alice," he said gravely, in the voice of a grown-up

imparting to a child a truth which he doubts will be comprehended, "the man who treats the woman he loves like a gentleman in the presence of others is a gentleman, indeed; but the man who treats the woman he loves like a gentleman when he is alone with her, is a fool."

She looked up into his eyes, trying vaguely to smile at the witticism. She did not understand why she should be so tearful. But she felt, at the moment, that if she could have buried her head against his shoulder, and weep and weep, with her arms wound about his neck, and his mouth on the nape of her neck, it would have been the height of felicity.

Still the tears flowed.

"Dewdrops in violets," he said. "Raindrops on forget-me-nots. Teardrops in a woman's eyes." Then he bent over, and kissed first the right and then the left eye.

"I have tasted the salt of your tears," he said in a voice whose cadence was like the consecration of a priest, "I have tasted the bitterness of your heart. You have allowed me to do so. Now, also, you must allow that I show you the way to the kingdom of earth in which, to those who dwell therein, there is neither misery nor anger nor tears. Think no evil, my love, for I would not spoil the betrothal of our souls by as much as an impure thought. Think no evil, my love, for I can know no evil when you are near me."

The slow, voluptuous rhythm of his voice seemed to communicate itself to her blood; a strange vibration shook her entire body. She wondered why he did not kiss her; then she realized with the consciousness of a wrong-doer that she longed for his kisses.

Suddenly he kissed her. Bending back her head, he kissed her lingeringly once, only once upon the lips. But

to her his kiss seemed to make of life a dazzling vision of surpassing beauty.

Thus he swept her at his pleasure from the turgid depths of desire to the lyric heights of poetic passion—she all unconscious that she was the lute and he the player, that he was attuning her, searching her, adapting her to his touch even as the violinist tunes his instrument and adapts it to himself before using it.

CHAPTER V

Alice slept placidly all through that night. Ulrich had lulled and stilled her terror of him, and with his powerful rhetoric had placed a quietus upon her half-awakened, half-dormant passion.

She had again abandoned herself to the delicious delusion that the emotions he had stimulated in her at times were fancied and not real, that she was merely playing a little with love, and that she did not desire in the least to actually enter the "kingdom of earth" which he had depicted so glowingly. There was no real danger for her, she felt confident, and she was quite sure now that it was readily within the province of her will to expel all thoughts of him from her mind and heart, should the phantom of real, actual danger arise.

So it happened that there was neither embarrassment, nor timidity, nor fear in her manner or in her heart, as she came down the hospital steps that Sunday morning to meet him, where he stood waiting for her with the automobile.

Until then von Dette had seen her only in her nurse's uniform, and he had not supposed that any other garb could heighten her loveliness in his eyes, accustomed as he was to perceive the intrinsic value of a woman at the first glance. But the girl's beauty was such, as she stood before him, her perfectly moulded figure sheathed in pale gray voile that, cynical, libertine though he was, a sharp ejaculation of surprise escaped his lips. She

might, as she stood there, have served for a painter engaged in presenting those rare, luscious days when the radiance of Spring almost imperceptibly deepens and merges in the glory of Summer. All the sweetness and sparkling freshness of early youth was upon her, all the callowness, the *gaucherie* of too-early youth was gone; her whole being was instinct with and prophetic of that maturity of beauty when knowledge and experience would have consummated the handiwork of Nature.

As he gazed upon her, a terrible thrill of desire overcame him, and to suppress it, he began a long discussion with the chauffeur concerning a fancied weakness of the machine, about the roads, about anything. When he came back to her, he was again the deft man of the world, self-contained, self-controlled, willing to mortify the flesh at any cost for days to come for the sake of the ultimate intoxication that waited for him, when he had finally run down his game. He was afraid to frighten away his prey by too clearly betraying the end in view, by any ill-advised move that might arouse her suspicion, and put her on her guard.

"Well," he said, as the automobile rolled down the street, "the betrothal of our souls could not have chanced upon a lovelier day. Will you trust me? Or must I tell you where we are going?"

"I will trust you," she said demurely, playfully, "since I have your assurance that upon this day can fall neither evil things nor evil thoughts."

He smiled, coldly, so it seemed to her. In truth, her beauty was intoxicating him, and he dared show no warmth lest the torch of cordiality burst prematurely into the furnace-like blaze of passion. Finally he spoke, asking permission to place a warm wrap about her shoulders, and in doing so, through the jerking of the machine, his

fingers touched the nape of her neck, where the white flesh showed through the loosely woven network of the lace.

"Dearest," he murmured passionately, feeling that he must let that one word serve as an outlet for his feelings. "Dearest!"

Alice placed her fingers upon her mouth with the prettiest gesture imaginable.

"Hush!" she said, "our souls are listening."

"You are adorable," he murmured. The terrible sensuality that had possessed him for days fell away from him. It seemed to him that the daintiness, the charm of her rebuke had banished it.

He felt that there was a slight reversal of their relations, a modification, certainly. Until now he had held the whip hand. He had forced her into falling madly in love with him, while he himself was held well in check. To-day he felt less sure of her, and less sure also of himself. It was quite possible that his ardor exceeded hers, that he already cared more for her than she did for him. But she was very lovely, and he was willing to pay a higher price than usual in the way of preliminary courting, preliminary suffering.

He felt distinctly grateful to her for having liberated him from the sting of his pain. He was a materialist, a man of pleasure, no doubt, but he was also a man of poetic moods, of finer perceptions, of exaggerated artistic instincts. There was no coarseness, no vulgarity in him. It had been one of his unexpressed griefs that had at times disgusted him with himself and increased the cynicism with which he regarded all human nature, that among all the women who had attracted him, with whom he had had *liaisons* or desired to have them, there had not been one good, one superior woman—not one who had

held him by any other means than the transitory pleasure she afforded.

Ulrich was as merciless in his criticism of himself as in his analysis of others; he had, at the outset of his amorous experiences, ascribed this circumstance to the limitations of each successive woman, and with the insolent judgment of early youth had decided that the woman whom he could really love, who would appeal to his heart and his mind and his senses as well, was an impossible myth. Good women seemed to him, in these early days, either stupid or insipid. The women of the great world, with whom his rank brought him into abundant contact, seemed ambitious, shallow, vain, insincere, on the same spiritual level almost, as far as self-seeking went, as his *demi-mondaines*, with the unappreciable difference that whereas he paid the latter in francs or marks, the former, for favors granted, exacted payment in furtherance of social position, or some similar emolument which it was in his power to procure. Because of his high rank, his favors stood for much in certain circles. The really virtuous woman, matron and maid alike, had impressed him as intolerably deficient in temperament, and a woman who was deficient in temperament could never, he knew, accelerate the pulsing of his blood by the fraction of a second.

There had been witty women, women with whom conversation and social intercourse had been a delight, but there had always been some trait, mental or physical, that had made it impossible for them to inspire in him the *grande passion*.

He was excessively fastidious. A strait-laced notion, an unbecoming hat, a mole, an imperfectly rounded arm, a mere bagatelle, was sufficient to repel him. He had pursued many a woman who had at first appealed strongly

to him, and had abruptly abandoned the chase because of some suddenly conceived disgust. This had earned for him the name of a flirt, a breaker of hearts, and as none of the fair ones whom he had pursued and then abandoned ever ascribed his sudden defection to lack of attractiveness on her own part, but to the lashings of a suddenly awakened conscience on his, he passed as a man of fair morality.

As he grew older, and *demi-mondaine* succeeded *demi-mondaine*, each being thrown aside in turn as he wearied of her attractions, he became skeptical as to his former theory. Perhaps the woman whom a man might really love was after all no myth. He, who was so readily disgusted with any superficial blemish in virtuous women, overlooked similar, perhaps greater, blemishes with the greatest unconcern in a *demi-mondaine*. Was it then some inherent leprosy of his own mind that made it impossible for him to be fascinated by any woman whose manner was not suggestive, whose personality was not steeped in that subtle aroma of the woman of 'easy virtue? It made him furious to think this of himself. He began, at this time, to cultivate a closer acquaintance with his cousin Sylvia, in the hopes of forcing himself to love her. For many reasons a marriage with Sylvia would have been desirable, but though he sought sedulously to produce the psychological feeling in himself that would warrant his asking her to marry him, he did not succeed. Only he, with his inveterate cynicism, termed it "physiological feeling."

But then, Sylvia was a brunette. He was very fond of Sylvia, in a brotherly sort of way, but that was all. And loose as was the moral code of Ulrich von Dette, he had his code. He would not marry a woman he did not love.

After that he despaired of finding a woman who would be all that he desired!

All that he desired!

He formulated a brief of what a woman should be. She should be not only completely adapted to her lover's needs, but should possess an unfailing genius to alternately arouse and quench his desire, to adapt herself to whatever he desired his mood to be at the moment. And she must also be able to cater to other, non-sensual moods. Manlike, not finding his ideal, he was content with an approximate substitute. Often he thought of Taine's witty dictum, "At eighteen we desire a madonna and are satisfied with a servant-girl."

Now, sitting beside Alice, he wondered vaguely what this affair would drift into.

He had his first premonition that Sunday morning that the girl at his side might be *the* woman, not merely a woman. He had a curious presentiment that now, when he had all but despaired of meeting with the great adventure, when he had begun to view its very possibility with contemptuous cynicism, the hour might be at hand in which his youthful dream was to come true.

Certainly this girl was different, very, very different, from any woman he had met. She was young, and she was passionate, that he could see; but she had brains, that also he knew to a certainty, and she could converse cleverly, and now she was unfolding still another side, a playful, feminine side, a sweetly spiritual side that endeared her to him a hundred fold.

Then, her coloring was an unadulterated joy to him. He was a little tired of the flaxen-haired beauties of his native land. He remembered the time in his student days when he had gone wild over every golden-haired

peasant girl, for bloneness moved him intensely, creating in him not only a sensual sensation, but an extraordinary tenderness. He remembered among the women of his past, one in particular who had had nothing whatever to recommend her excepting her hair and her complexion. Her features had been coarse, her contours unlovely, her voice shrill and unpleasant, but she had held him effectually for a while by the spell cast upon him by her hair, which was so wonderfully fine and heavy that she was forced to wear it down her back, like a little girl. But he had tired of her very soon. It had barely been an *amour*, the merest infatuation, more evanescent and ephemeral even than the others. And he had wandered on to others. But always and always it had been the blonde woman who attracted and held him, appealing first to his tenderness and his esthetic taste, and who, then, in some subtle way, became altogether desirable to him. But there had been so many with the same color of hair, for though the shades varied from faintest baby blonde to darkly burnished gold, there had been no difference in the quality, the timbre of the color, just as a dozen shades or so of embroidery floss are employed in the working of one single flower, and though these different shades differ and vary, running from the very light ones to the intensely dark shades, yet their difference is due only to the difference in the amount of light they diffuse, and is in no way fundamental or suggestive of any than the merest superficial difference.

He had sometimes thought that a dark woman would make a welcome change, just as a man, though port be his favorite wine, will sometimes drink a sauterne or a sherry, even if he does not care particularly for these vintages, for the mere sake of contrast thereby afforded his palate, so that port, on being tasted again will be all

the more gratifying. But he had failed to interest himself in Sylvia, and after that episode he sought again purposely and deliberately to become interested in some dark-eyed, dark-haired nymph. But strive as he would, as in Sylvia's case, he could not bring himself to the verge of even the most casual infatuation for a dark woman. The most insinuating glances, received and given, the most intimate conversations, the closest proximity allowed by the conventions of the drawing-and ballroom and sometimes the boudoir, had failed to fire his blood or engage his emotions. Dark women remained in his estimation what they had been before—good for decorative purposes only.

So, a little weary of the procession of blondes, a trifle bored by their mental as well as personal sameness, he wandered on. *Que voulez-vous?* What was a man to do? The love of a woman was indispensable to him.

And thus with a delight that was tremendous and infinitesimal at the same time, tremendous because deep, infinitesimal since it noted nuances so fine that they might have escaped a less keen observer, he perceived the quality in Alice's coloring that differentiated her from other blondes. He was so sure now—this morning—that this visible difference was merely a tangible proof of a difference that was internal as well, a difference which she had most auspiciously begun to manifest, and that this woman would not only be the most beautiful he had ever won, but the most interesting, and in every way the most satisfactory.

She was a decisive blonde, it is true, but upon her hair was not a shimmer of gold, rather the sheen of silver. When the sun shone upon her hair, its radiance dazzled, but did not warm. It was brilliantly cool, but her hair seemed warm when out of the sunlight. It then lost its

silvery effulgence, and appeared to be the shade of very lightly smoked meerschaum, very exquisite, very distinctive, with a suggestion of softness that was at once chaste and warm. He thought he would never tire of looking at her hair. If she consented to accept him as a lover, and he had no doubt that she would, he was determined to make her cut off her hair the moment it showed the first white threads. He would force her to save her combings—she had probably never thought of it—and there would then be enough of her own beautiful hair to make her a fine wig, and he would see her always wearing her pale crown of hair, and would not endure the ordeal of seeing it shed its glory of turning piebald and streaky, a change to which he was particularly sensitive.

It pleased him to think he had had this thought. He had never before thought ahead of the possible appearance of any woman many years hence. They had been creatures of a day, or of an hour, and so long as they sufficed to while away that day or hour, he had asked nothing more of them. And it came to him as an extraordinary occurrence that he should thus subconsciously have considered the possibility of prolonging this intrigue interminably, that he should consider such a prolongation desirable. That Alice had been capable of creating in him this unique emotion was an experience sufficiently remarkable in itself to be deemed prophetic of the fortuitousness of the intrigue he was embarking upon.

Would he perhaps desire to marry her? Ulrich was intimately acquainted with the worst side of his character. He gloried in it; it was a matter of vanity with him; and now the perception came to him with startling precision that there was a convex side to the concave side of his code which had determined him to marry no

woman he could not whole-heartedly love, and that convex side of the code possibly would demand of him that, having found the one woman, he should marry her, irrespective of station.

Would he, then, be faithful to her? That would be a new experience also, and he hoped she might bring the miracle to pass. To be faithful to one woman for months, for years, perhaps! He had always believed it to be an impossibility for a man of any spirit. He knew men who went home every night to their wives and their home supper in contentment, even with a certain expectation of pleasure. This had seemed very ridiculous to Ulrich. He craved variety in food, in cooking, in books, in women. No matter how fond a man is of roast beef or a leg of mutton, there surely comes a time when he yearns for *Leberpasteten* and *Gaensebrust*. No matter how devoted a man is to the substantial fare of Pliny or Epictetus, there are times when he craves the volatile essence of life embodied in Voltaire's writings, or the titillating, ticklish charm of a Balzac or a Boccaccio. It showed a remarkable lack of enterprise, an incomprehensible dulness for a man to remain true to one woman only, and argued a deficiency in amorous adventuresomeness which caused Ulrich to feel a compassion for such a man not unlike the compassion he lavished upon the blind, the halt, the physically or mentally incapable.

What, then, would be the outcome of this affair? He asked the question of himself the second time.

They were flying along the avenue, and Alice, her head slightly inclined to meet the wind, sat in silence. He wondered how long she would have the temerity to continue silent, and to do it so unconsciously. She seemed this morning to him like a different woman, not as young, not as inexperienced, more of the woman of the world,

with all her pristine sweetness intact, however, and as evident as a bunch of violets in a warm room.

Suddenly she turned and faced him. Would she indulge in some commonplace remark after that adorable rebuke she had administered to him?

"Does spiritual betrothal impose silence upon the contracting parties?" she asked coyly.

He smiled down into her eyes.

"Forgive me," he said. "I have been stupid. Alice, you have rendered me speechless. No, I am not saying something that I should not say; you have made me stupid and dull because you are in a mood in which I have never seen you, which I did not suspect you capable of, my little wise owl."

Alice laughed and then pulled a long face.

"I am so sorry you are disappointed in me," she said.

"Disappointed?" He was in doubt whether she was serious or mischievous.

"Disappointed, yes, for since you liked me in the mood you knew, and did not suspect this one——"

He clasped her hand.

"Dearest," he said, "if you look at me like that again, I shall kiss you right here on the avenue before all those people as spectators."

"I would not mind all those strangers a bit as spectators."

"What?" He was infinitely entertained by her audacity.

"But I would mind the invisible spectators. Must I remind you of them again? The bride and bridegroom."

He bent down and kissed her hand, where it lay in her lap.

"I could not help it, dearest," he explained. "You are bewitching, adorable."

"I should be no less, since I enter Paradise to-day——"

"Paradise?" He was honestly bewildered.

"You have not told me, but the Kingdom of Earth—I supposed it was Paradise where you were taking me to?"

She smiled up into his face, and there was such sweetness, such humility in her voice that it completely neutralized the playfulness of her manner.

A pain moved in his throat of which he had believed himself incapable. He could not speak for the moment, but pressed her hand.

"If she continues like this all day," he thought, "I shall worship her by evening as I have never worshipped any woman before."

Finally, at the end of a twenty-mile run, when crossing the river, they came upon a large park, inclosed with a high wall of gray stone, above which the branches of the trees made sweet music in the wind. At the entrance were iron gates, across which was hung a placard so enormous that it completely hid from view the strip of park which would otherwise have been visible between the iron grill-work. The placard read, "Closed for Repairs. Open next Sunday."

Alice gave an exclamation of disappointment, but Ulrich laughed.

"That was my inspiration, that board," he said, "so that we may have the grounds to ourselves." Alighting, he unlocked the padlock which held the gates together.

The grounds into which they passed were beautiful indeed. Well-kept as was the lawn, there was an air of desolation and wild grandeur about the place that struck fire to Alice's imagination. To her it seemed like enchanted ground, and in fancy she harked back to those early days of her girlhood when the world was still

swathed in the rose-hue of romantic glamour, before she had known about the mystery of life.

Now she was standing upon the threshold of life, and its mystery!

"See those chestnuts," said Ulrich, pointing with his cane to the cone-shaped, starry white blossoms standing on their branches like huge mignonettes.

"They are the bouquets for the bridesmaids. They have been dipped in snow, that is why they are white as virginity; they have been kissed by love, therefore are their lips red as desire."

Further on they sat down upon the greensward, where the grass was lush and uncut, and buried their hands in the long, sweet-smelling blades, drawing it luxuriously through their fingers, crushing it, inhaling its fragrance in long, sensuous sniffs.

Alice plaited three blades of grass, while Ulrich watched her with interest.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"You shall see." And she continued to deftly lace and interlace the long, strong blades. Presently she broke them, and knotting the two ends together ingeniously, she held out to him a ring.

"This is your betrothal ring," she said.

The soft dewiness of her eyes as she looked at him in saying this moved him to sudden tenderness. It seemed to him that he was being purified by some painless flame, that he was discovering a sweetness in life which he had hitherto not suspected.

He took the ring and slipped it upon his finger.

"Now you must make one for yourself."

"No, no; to-day the order of things is reversed. To-day I wear no ring, but you must wear one as a symbol of your captivity."



"WE WILL HAVE THE GROUNDS TO OURSELVES."

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"Yes," he murmured, remembering the cool touch of her fingers upon his burning hand, when she had handed him the ring. "Heavens knows, I am your captive indeed, more than you imagine, more than I myself imagined."

Suddenly his passion swept through him. He felt he must take her in his arms, and crush her to his breast, and kiss her upon her pale mouth. But she evaded him, and with a deeply wise look, such as a child, playing at being a grown-up, may wear, said, motioning to a bed of white tulips:

"Sssch! See those children watching us yonder! You would not behave indecorously, would you, in the presence of those little girls, all in white dresses, ready for their first communion?"

As in the morning, he felt that she had allayed his passion as quickly as she had aroused it. He loved her so holily at the moment that, had she bade him, he would have kissed the ground on which she had trod. Suddenly he rebelled, suddenly he became angry that in view of his very evident emotion, she was capable of remaining so cool, so detached, so distant. But the wave of his anger receded almost immediately. Had he not desired above everything to find a woman who would have this power, who would not merely be beautiful flesh, but beautiful spirit informing beautiful flesh, exalting it, ennobling it, making it more desirable, more wonderful?

"I have not yet told you where we are," he said presently.

"Does Eden require a definition?"

"No, but an explanation."

"An explanation?"

Startled by a sudden light in his eyes, she drew away from him.

"The explanation is impossible in words. The only way to arrive at it is to eat of the Apple—the Apple of Eden."

He took her hand.

"But we will not eat of it to-day," he continued gently, to reassure her, for he saw terror mounting to her eyes. "We will merely look at it from a distance, and think how wonderful it is."

She withdrew her hand from his. It was warm and moist from his clasp, and she thrust it back into the dewy grass, as if to cool it. He sat regarding her closely, almost hungrily.

She was very pale. It seemed to Ulrich that he had never seen any woman quite so white before, but her cheeks were tinged with pink, not through and through, but delicately marked as some peonies are marked, along the lips, with a faint shell pink. And her hair, of the lightly smoked meerschaum hue, was so fair near the roots that the line where hair and skin joined was barely perceptible. Her fairness imparted to her an appearance of exaggerated innocence. He endeavored to get his mind away from himself, and fell in with her playful mood.

"Have you noticed the fuchsias?" he asked. "They are the wedding-bells. See, the bell itself is red, the color of love, and the cup that holds it is purple, the color of royalty. Thus does the fuchsia signify the majesty of the empire of love. Have you noticed your wedding candles? No, I thought not. Look at that fir-tree, and this. The spring has lighted the tips of the candles, and the flame burns pale green, the color of pristine purity."

They dined in a round pavilion, open on all sides, admitting air and light, and completely overgrown and hung with wistarias, and the wealth of the fairy-like blos-

soms with its lacy, fern-like foliage, that transformed itself to stained glass windows as the magic rays of the sun penetrated it, and painted upon the snowy linen on the tables bright splotches of emerald and amethyst. The delicate perfume of the flowers mingled with the rich odor of the food, etherealizing it, making of their repast a matter less of the grosser appetite than of their esthetic sensibilities.

Ulrich took one of these blossoms in his hand. The soft, flaccid flower fell limply from either side of his hand, and Alice felt the unaccountable loathing sweep over her again, which, at sight of his hands, she so violently experienced. There seemed to her some foulness, some vitiating uncleanness in those soft, white, perfervid hands. Thus, she thought, might they handle a corpse, lingering over the touch of it, gloatingly, perhaps, certainly without disgust, without any hostile emotion of any kind, feeling, moreover, a morbid enjoyment at contact of the cool, unresponsive lifeless flesh. And it came to her that these hands, these same hands that handled a corpse and this exquisite blossom alike dispassionately, had caressed and mastered women as the hands of other men caressed and played with and mastered horses and dogs.

She could not disentangle her vision from his hand, slowly and with evident pleasure moving the flower to and fro, with a tremulous, waving motion. An instinctive horror of the man again swept over her, and it seemed to her that she would never be able to sit opposite to him for a full hour, and pretend that she was enjoying her food in the presence of these well-trained menials.

They were alone for a few moments, and Ulrich profited by it to say:

"These blossoms are a perfect presentment of love.

Their delicate hue is symbolic of the mist that enshrouds love: like distant mountains, their appeals to our imagination, reminds us of that which we have never known, sinks into our soul. See, how the separate flowers that make up the whole are but loosely bound together. You can pull forth one blossom, and at first you will hardly notice its absence, but on turning over the entire flower, you will at once perceive that it is mutilated. Thus with love. Love for one individual is made up of a thousand different motives, a thousand different attractions. Remove one of those attractions, one of those fascinations, and you have mutilated that particular love. It will never be the same again."

They had four persons to wait on them. One waiter carried the trays from the kitchen; one boy, dressed in a fantastic dress suit with long pantaloons, who, Ulrich explained, was a genuine imported "*piccolo*," and who waited on the waiters; the waiter who served the dishes and attended to the champagne; and the waiter who placed dishes and wine before them.

Alice was very much amused by this waiter's gravity. He seemed to bow every time as he placed a dish before Ulrich. She had never seen any human being convey such an impression of deference as he employed, and once, when Ulrich asked him something or other in German, he replied:

"Ja, Hoheit."

The doctor flashed an annihilatory look at the man, beneath which he seemed to wither.

Alice had somewheres read or heard that word before, and she was sure it signified a high rank, much higher than that of baron, surely. Was Ulrich then a count? Or a marquis? Or possibly a duke? She could think of no higher rank than that.

The dessert having been served, Ulrich dismissed the waiters, and Alice asked, her curiosity getting the better of her:

"What does that word mean — *Hoheit*?"

"I thought, dearest, we had agreed that we should not eat of the fruit of knowledge to-day?"

"So we did," she responded gaily. "We are just to admire it, and perhaps tear off a bit of the peel so as to get a better glimpse of the appetizing fruit."

"How clever you are, Alice!"

He arose, walked around the table, and to her amazement, fell on his knees before her.

"Alice," he said, with great seriousness, "I love you. I cannot tell you how much I love you. Tell me that you care just a little for me?"

The girl put her hand under his chin. She felt a little thrill as she did this. She did not really want to do this, but again that strange, blind force seemed to push her on. She looked lingeringly into his eyes. They seemed, at the moment, like pools of water through which the moon had sent a thousand and one arrows of glimmering gold. There crept over her a delicious feeling of languor, of physical nearness to him, in which there was nothing violent, nothing to trouble her, which seemed rather to be a species of physical poetry.

"Are you not tearing away a very large part of the skin?" she asked.

"You are cruel."

He arose abruptly, and dusted his knees with his handkerchief, without looking at her. Her heart began to beat wildly. Had she made him angry? She wondered that she should care so much. But he was not angry, as she saw when he looked at her a moment later.

"I will answer your question before the day is up," he said gravely, "and you, in return, will answer mine."

There was something of his former cool superciliousness in his voice as he made this statement.

The waiter in the silk knee breeches appeared and put a question to Ulrich in rapid German. The doctor, in reply, uttered a decisive, annoyed "*Nein*," accompanied by a look so black that the girl's curiosity was aroused anew.

The air of mystery that hung about this man was certainly delightful. Her love of the romantic was being satisfied at last.

She stood before him, her hands clasped upon her bosom.

"What has made you angry, Ulrich?" she asked, aware that her voice was modulated to a caressing tone.

"No, no, you must not ask."

"You deny me an answer to everything," she pouted. "Why will you be so mysterious?"

"Do you really desire to know?" He had put an arm about her waist, holding her loosely in his embrace.

"Of course I do."

"I warn you."

A little frightened at her own temerity, she continued smiling into his eyes, inviting him to speak.

He quickly drew her to him, and pressing her head upon his left shoulder, he whispered in her ear:

"He wanted to know whether we desired a room."

"Oh!"

She tried to disengage herself, but he held her, and she felt her ear between his teeth. She gave a sharp cry of pain. He released her.

"You hurt me," she said with some show of indignation.

"I am glad I did."

Before she could help herself, he had her in his arms again, and had his lips upon hers. She felt his teeth close upon her lower lip. She did not feel the pain, but she was faint, and to steady herself, she put out her free hand as if for support.

"Let me go, let me go," she moaned. Suddenly she grew limp, her knees gave way. She had fainted. She felt cold water on her face.

"I am sorry," Ulrich was saying. "Forgive me, forgive me. It was inexcusable. I had not meant to."

She was sitting in an arm-chair, her head propped up by a pillow, and Ulrich, white and frightened-looking, was near her, but making no effort to support her. Suddenly he bent over, and taking a cambric handkerchief from his pocket, bade her open her lips. She obeyed without hesitation, and as he brought the kerchief away she saw a drop of blood upon it.

"You had better rinse your mouth," he said, "and then drink a little water."

He poured out some water, and again she obeyed him blindly, and while she was drinking the water she wondered at her obedience and at the pleasure it gave her to blindly do what he told her to do.

"Let us go out into the garden," he said, "there is no air here. The scent of these flowers drives one mad. It is like the fumes of opium. Come, let us go."

He was very gentle and tender with her now, almost reverential. A curious sensation came over her, a sensation of belonging to him, of his belonging to her.

It seemed to her that life was a vast poem which it required two to read, and that this strange, mysterious, dazzling man was going to con the lines with her.

They came upon the ruins of a church; the belfry was

still standing and was covered with ivy, and the blue sky peeped through the chinks and holes of the crumbling wall. And he related to her how, over a century ago, there had been a flourishing and prosperous village upon this site. The villagers had lived as one great family, all men working, no man wanting, but the patriarch who attended to the dealings of the village with the outside world, died suddenly, and the villagers, left to themselves, helpless as children, when coping with the world, had one by one left their homes and gone elsewhere to seek new fortunes.

They came upon the ruins of a cottage. The roof was gone, the walls were shreds and patches, but one window remained clean-cut and surrounded by decaying walls, and one solitary rose had thrust itself through this ancient window-frame, seeking the brighter light that waited it outside of the ruins.

Ulrich was going to pick it for her, but she restrained him.

"Do not pick it," she said. She pointed to a bit of broken flower-pot near the roots of the rose. Perhaps it was planted in that flower-pot by some lover, and given to his sweetheart. Leave it alone. Let it live its little day, and then perish here, where it has grown and bloomed for nearly a century. Perhaps, in the far-away past two lovers stood and looked at it, and enjoyed its beauty and its perfume on a spring day, even as you and I are standing——"

Her voice trailed off without completing the sentence. A sudden intimacy sprang up between them, enriched by a feeling of remote melancholy by the vision which she had invoked. The wind stirred uneasily in the branches of the century-old trees above them, and looking at each other, the same thought came to them both, how years

and years ago, those hypothetical lovers might have stood and listened to those same trees, then in their infancy, full of promise, full of the future, as themselves. What had been their fate? What was their own fate to be?

"Do you remember Oscar Wilde's lines from *Reading Gaol*?" asked Ulrich.

"'Out of his mouth a red, red rose,
Out of his heart a white——'"

Perhaps some villager is buried here, the lover of long ago or his lass; perhaps this rose is fed by what was once her ruby mouth."

"Don't," she said. "Don't. How can you think of such hateful things now? See how beautiful all the world is! You have spoiled the rose for me. Let us go on."

But Ulrich was in a strange, a perverse mood, and when they came upon a purple hyacinth, the last that remained unwithered of an entire bed, he picked it, and showing it to Alice, said:

"What does it remind you of?" he questioned.

Before she could reply, he continued:

"Those curled petals are like the curls of a man's dead mistress, whose lover has been maddened by the futility of the kisses showered upon her cold cheek. The poison of love and the poison of death thus subtly blended, corroded her golden curls and turned them purple—the color of decay, of majesty, of love."

Ulrich delivered these words in that low, luxurious tone of voice which Alice had come to fear so greatly, which always aroused in her the feeling as if some invisible force were enshrouding her with some garment in whose folds lurked a poison, as in the *Golden Fleece*,

which would paralyze her, rob her of her volition, which would eat into her marrow, her flesh, her soul.

"You are terrible," she said. "Terrible. You love to dwell on perverse thoughts." She became frightened at her emotion. She foresaw that unless she controlled her imagination, Ulrich would perceive it, and would again attempt to embrace her, as he had done in the pavilion.

She handed him back the hyacinth.

"Take it," she said. "I cannot bear to touch it now. You have spoiled that for me also. Hyacinths will never look the same. And I loved them so because of Omar Khayyam."

"Omar Khayyam?" he questioned. He had not read the Rubaiyat.

She repeated :

"I sometimes think that never blows so red
A rose as where some slaughtered Cæsar bled,
That every hyacinth the garden wears
Dropped in her lap from some once lovely head."

Ulrich listened attentively.

"That is new to me," he said. "The lines are very beautiful. But since you admire them also, I do not see why you found fault with me for expressing my thoughts on the purple hyacinth before, since the lines of Omar contain almost the same thought, only it is veiled by him, made more subtle, and is therefore more insidious, more insinuating."

"I will not admit that," she said.

She spoke vehemently to reassure herself, for she perceived there was a kernel of truth in Ulrich's statement.

He smiled, and they sat down together in the grass, under a horse-chestnut tree. His voice was infinitely caressing and ingratiating. He said :

"Yes, Alice, you do. But you are like those Puritans who cannot bear to look upon an undraped, completely nude statue of the human form. But if the sculptor were to chisel a figure with a vestment as fine as gossamer, veiling the bare flesh, but revealing every contour, every outline, they will take no exception. Yet that spider-web garment infinitely enhances the seductiveness of the figure, because it partially hides, partially accentuates the voluptuousness of the bosom, the hips, the abdomen, thereby stimulating the imagination to penetrate beneath the veil."

Alice did not reply. She looked up at him with calm, innocent eyes. He gazed down into them, seeming to lose himself in their depths. It seemed to him that her eyes besought him to leave her alone, not to torment her, but as he continued to gaze into her orbs, he saw the pleading note disappear, and instead they became troubled, as tropical waters on a stormy day suddenly change from indigo blue to murkiness. They became impenetrable, as if she had consciously slipped a film over them to hide her thoughts from him. There was a menace in them, as if she meant to convey to him that he had better beware, that she, too, could shake him to the very depths of his being. They became provocative, as if she were no longer afraid to test her strength against his, to oppose herself against him in the struggle which would sooner or later take place between them. She became alluring, captivating. She no longer seemed to him a simple young girl, ignorant, innocent, inexperienced, but a woman deep in knowledge, rich in the wisdom of such things, thoroughly formidable.

"Kiss me," he whispered.

She smiled ever so faintly, but the smile altered only the lines of her mouth, and in no way changed the

sphinx-like look of the eyes. Ulrich's pulse began to throb, his heart to beat.

"Ulrich," she said, speaking in an exaggeratedly chaste voice, "you must not kiss me again. Kisses are sweetmeats, and too many bonbons in one day are not good for little boys."

She stroked his hair lightly, brushing it back with her fingers from his temples with a gesture such as a mother might employ in soothing a fretful child.

"How she dominates me!" he thought. "How she stimulates me only to lull my senses asleep again with a playful phrase, with a glance from her eyes, with the subtle intonation of her voice, with the touch of her cool fingers!"

He closed his eyes, and then spoke again:

"Alice, I have something to tell you. But tell me first, I beseech you, do you love me?"

"I love you, yes, as part of a unique day, as I love the sky, the flowers, the trees, the grass. They have all helped to make this day unforgettable, perfect."

He caught her hand with sudden violence, and wrung it so forcefully, so roughly, that she squirmed with the pain.

"Alice," he said, "you must be serious. I love you. You cannot realize how much. Never have I loved any woman as I love you."

A feeling of exhilaration came over her as he spoke. She became calm. Leaning back against a tree, she regarded him tranquilly. The visible emotion he was laboring under quieted her, pacified her inconceivably. It created in her a desire to play with him, to see him become more intense, more uncontrollable.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked, speaking in the same vehement tone.

"I am wondering," she said softly, "how many women have heard you say those very words."

He flushed. She could see that he was very angry. She wondered what he would say. She was enjoying his agitation.

"You are a child," he burst forth. "You are a simpleton. I have never paid any woman I desired to win the compliment of lying to her——"

"I am the first one?" she smiled cruelly.

"No, I did not pay you the compliment of lying. I paid you the compliment, no less great, of telling you the truth. That is because I desire you as wife or sweetheart, as you choose."

She had not expected him to come to the point so suddenly. She, in turn, became agitated. He was standing beside her, towering above her—it seemed to her excited imagination—ready to hurl himself upon her like an avalanche of fire and snow. In one frightful moment of self-revelation, it came to her that if she dominated him, his dominion over her was no less, was perhaps far greater because of her youth, and destined to become cataclysmal for her, subversive of her peace of mind.

She did not understand why he should ask her to marry him after knowing her only a few days. She was thoroughly frightened. She feared, she knew not what.

"I will be neither," she said.

"Why not? Are you married?"

"No, no."

That reassured him. All women of spirit, when young, repudiate the idea of marriage.

"Alice," he said, "in offering you marriage, I must, as a man of honor, explain to you just who I am."

Speaking quickly, in an alert, incisive, authoritative way, he told her that he was a prince of Hohenhoff-

Hohe, the most important of the kingdoms of the German Empire, excepting Prussia and Bavaria. Sylvia's father had been the eldest son of the present king, his grandfather, whose demise was expected at any moment. Sylvia's father was dead, and she was his only living child, but the Salic law barred her from the succession. The second son of Ulrich's grandfather, the present king, had married late in life, so that until recently Ulrich, who was the only son of the present king's youngest son, had been heir-apparent, or *Erbprinz*. But the marriage of the second son of the old king had resulted in one son, *Prinz Eitel Egon*, aged eight, so that his own pretensions to the throne through the birth of this little boy had become remote, a fact which troubled him very little, as he had always preferred medicine to politics. Still rank was rank, and the possibility remained that he might one day inherit the crown of Hohenhoff-Hohe, and having been brought up as heir-apparent, and being thoroughly drilled and schooled to occupy the throne, he felt considerable scruples about contracting an alliance which would bar his legitimate offspring from inheriting his titles.

"Once Eitel Egon is married, and has children," said Ulrich, "I shall be at liberty to marry as I please. Until then I can offer you a morganatic marriage only, which allows me to retain my right to the succession for my children through a subsequent marriage with a woman of my own rank. I have always held that a morganatic marriage is an insult to a woman, a worse insult by far than to ask a woman to accept me as a lover, for a morganatic marriage is merely a sort of sop thrown to a woman to ease her conscience. It in no way secures the rights of her children to their father's titles or rank or estate. It is merely a guarantee that her husband

cannot discard her unceremoniously when he is tired of her. Is not that an insult in itself? Would you, would any woman of fine sensibilities desire to forcibly retain her claim upon a man, should love wane? And you, were you ten times my wife, Alice, would not hold me more securely than as my sweetheart. And as to a regular marriage, which would force me to forego my appanages and to swear away the right of succession of my children, I am quite certain that you, you of all women, will understand my scruples which tell me I have no right to dispose of the rights of my unborn children. It is a fine point, but you will see it, I am sure, in the same light as I do."

Alice looked at him in bewilderment. His recital had been torture to her. His entire viewpoint was so different from anything with which she had ever come in contact, that she was at loss to find her way through this labyrinth of newness. Of one thing she felt certain. He had not meant the offer as an insult. With the generosity of the pure-minded woman, she exonerated him. In this point, also, his craftiness had triumphed over her innocence. He had, of course, no intention of marrying her. He had spoken for effect simply, hoping to dazzle her by telling her of his rank. He had not dazzled her nearly as much as he had expected to, however, and he regretted his frankness. The truth of the matter was that Alice was so completely fascinated by the man, that there was no emotion left in her pure little heart to bestow upon the prince.

"Answer me, dear," he implored.

"I think," she said weakly, "that you ought to marry a woman of your own rank."

"I have tried to," he said quietly. He was much struck by her answer and by the elimination of self which

it showed. "I have tried to make up my mind to marry Sylvia. It would have been fair to her, for it would have brought her children a step nearer to the throne of Hohenhoff-Hohe than if she married some one else. Also for the following reason the marriage would have been eminently desirable: Adjoining our kingdom is the Grandduchy Hohenhoff-Lohe. The present Grandduke is an uncle of Sylvia's, on her mother's side. The Salic law does not bar Sylvia from the grandduchy, and as her uncle is unmarried and childless, it is safe to assume the grandduchy will go to her. He is dying of cancer, and may live ten years more, or again may die to-morrow. Now if Sylvia and I were to marry, it would be quite possible, even likely, that the grandduchy and the kingdom would some day be united, as they were in the fifteenth century, making Hohenhoff-Hohe the second kingdom instead of the third, of Germany. But Sylvia is in love with some one else. And so am I, now. Possibly, if I had loved her, I could have made her love me."

"You speak as if love were a thing to be forced," said Alice, a little indignantly. She was only twenty-one, and at twenty-one we are prone to look upon love as a heaven-born gift, independent of any earthly circumstances, such as propinquity and financial considerations.

"What a child you are!" he said indulgently. "I believe that any man in the world, if he is really in love with a woman, can force her to respond, unless her affections are engaged elsewhere, and even then, if he is clever, and not too ill-looking, and willing to exert himself in pleasing her, he may have a good chance to win out. For this reason, if for no other, a man should have a variety of love affairs before he thinks of marrying, for in no other way can he learn all the clever tricks, the

dainty artifices, the little enticements by which love lives."

"You are terrible," said Alice. "Love is nothing to you but a matter of calculation. You leave nothing to the heart, nothing to the affections."

"You are mistaken," he retorted. "I believe in the affections, although what is commonly called heart is merely an amalgamation of the senses and the mentality. But I am waiting for your answer? Will you consent to be my sweetheart?"

It seemed to Alice that she was living in a dream. It had never occurred to her that any man would attempt to talk to her in this way. She had believed, whenever she had heard of some girl who had gone wrong, that it must be the girl's fault, wholly and entirely, no matter what well-meaning folks said to the contrary. She had always supposed that about "that sort of a man" there must be some monstrous aura, some visible, tangible, horrible something to warn everybody of his inner rottenness. Certainly she had always supposed such a man to be vulgar, to behave in a blatantly vulgar manner, to be ill-bred, stupid, and ordinary in every way.

And here was this aristocratic, brilliant stranger, who was quite the most wonderful creature she had ever met, and he was asking her quite calmly, in a charmingly well-bred manner, and with the most engaging frankness, to be—his mistress!

She wanted to repulse him, and she did not know how. There had been moments when she had wished to hurt him. But she did not wish to pain him at present. She wanted to be soft and sweet with him, and yet say him nay. She reflected that it had been wrong of her to come with him to-day, since he had already asked her to come

to his rooms, and that certainly should have been a sufficient indication of his intentions.

She should be feeling indignation, contempt, and she felt neither. At least she should have regarded him as an enemy. And she could not bring herself to do this. Always and always that strange, wonderful feeling of physical nearness to him brushed over her, and filled her with a sensation which she could not compare to any other, because it was sweeter and more delicious than anything she had ever experienced or had ever dreamed of.

She had thought that to be in love would be very different. She had believed love to be a sort of sublimated admiration, friendship on an exalted and exaggerated plane, but she had never believed or thought that it could induce such a feeling of delicious happiness and joy.

"You have not answered me," said Ulrich.

She took herself in hand vigorously.

"Doctor von Dette," she said, "I am very sorry you are saying these things to me. Can we not live just for to-day, and not think of the future?"

"I cannot think of the future without you," he said.

"You are very cruel," said Alice. "I realize that your rank is a gulf between us."

"It is no gulf at all, unless you do not care for me."

"I do care for you," she said in a low, frightened voice. "Please, dear Ulrich, do not let us continue this conversation. It frightens me."

Watching her, the doctor reflected that this might be some feminine feint intended to prolong his suspense and to place her in the light of not appearing over eager. The thought no sooner occurred to him than he concluded this must be the correct solution of her diffidence. In view of his offer of marriage, this made him angry.

He wished he had not mentioned Sylvia's name. Evidently this girl did not in the least appreciate what it meant for a prince of the blood to offer her even a morganatic marriage. Of course he had not really meant to marry her, even morganatically, but he had expected her to believe his offer sincere, and he was sure she did believe it sincere. He wondered whether he had been mistaken in her. He had believed her the sort of woman who perceiving a willingness on the part of the man to make a sacrifice, even the most trifling, will, in order not to be outdone in generosity, offer to make the most extravagant sacrifices for his sake.

His avowal of love, however, had been sincere, and it mortified him keenly to perceive the placidity with which she had accepted this. Doubtless he had cheapened himself in her eyes, since women rarely appreciated sincerity and gentleness, preferring the masterly, lordly hand, the lover who never completely loses control of himself in whose words there is always a germ of hypocrisy.

Suddenly she said:

"I am deeply grateful to you. I realize now that you care for me more than you have cared for any one else, as you said before, when I would not believe you."

Not knowing what was agitating her, her words seemed to him insufferably arrogant. He replied coldly:

"Naturally I was sincere. No man cares for any two women in the same way. You have entertained me regally as no other woman ever did before, because you did not arouse my amorous propensities to the degree that a day spent alone with another woman would have done."

He spoke the exact truth in saying this, yet it is by the garb in which we clothe truth, that we give it its complexion. And he knew very well that that which in his

eyes so illimitably increased her charm and made precious to him, she, in her imperfect reading of him, would construe as a deficiency in herself, something that made him love her less.

"In pursuing what I thought would be an agreeable amour," he soliloquized that evening, "I have discovered the woman who will change the face of the universe for me, who will make of love a rite, an ecstasy, a fitting consummation of a great lyric poem, whose rhythm is the pulsing of the blood, whose words are heart-beats, whose phrases are the immeasurable, vibrant immensity in which lovers are plunged by their kisses."

CHAPTER VI

Ulrich's annoyance did not wear away. He was not impetuous as a rule, and he was almost ashamed of himself for having allowed his passion to carry him off his feet. He could not deny to himself that failure to win the girl would make him intolerably miserable. He wanted her, every fibre of her. Never, in all his wild life, had he desired any woman as ardently as he desired this snow-white creature, this snow-dipped girl with her halo of lightly smoked meerschaum-colored hair.

He was filled with bitter resentment because she had repulsed him. He determined now to mortify her in some way or other, to subject her to cruel manoeuvres, since she did not appreciate mildness and kindness. It was with this determination to hurt her rampant within him that he entered the library the following Tuesday morning.

"I have made an egregious ass of myself," he thought, as he sat down beside her. "I shall, after seeing her daily for another week, discover some imperfection which will disgust me, annoy me, and make me loathe her." He watched her closely, as she read aloud some notes which ostensibly he wanted to compare with his own, and was amazed anew at her sweetness and charm, the bloom upon her skin, the perfection of her rounded bosom, the wonderful harmony of her face. The circles under her eyes, set deeply in her head, showed plainly this morning her fatigue, and this sign of lassitude, due to exertion or unrest of some sort, lashed his passion into a new whirlpool of heat, into a cauldron of turbulence.

He became frightened. "I love her even more than I thought." It occurred to him that he might run mad or fall seriously ill if she persisted in rejecting him. He felt at that moment that if she refused him, he might be capable of killing her.

She met his eyes at this instant, and the terror that swept over her on seeing the expression in his eyes and face deepened her own orbs until the blue iris was almost as dark as the pupil.

"Don't, please!" she murmured faintly.

"Don't what?" he asked brutally. As she did not reply, he continued mercilessly.

"You must not attach too much importance to my utterances of Sunday. Of course, I am very fond of you, but, after all, you are very much like other women. One woman is as good as another."

"Why, then I——?" she asked, goaded into incaution.

"You are the available woman," he replied nonchalantly, flecking a bit of tobacco from the lapel of his coat.

Alice flushed.

"Your theory is monstrous," she said angrily. "If you think to win me by such brutality, you are mistaken."

Her mortification was balm to his wounded pride.

"How do you know that I am really so very eager to win you? I may be merely amusing myself, keeping my hand in practice in the art of wooing. In spite of your beauty, which is undeniable, you may not be the sort of woman that men rave about."

"You are—oh—atrocious."

"Because I disavow any intention of wrong toward you? You are hard to please. Your quarrel Sunday, when you believed I wanted you, was, I believe, with my immorality."

"At any rate, I refuse to continue this conversation."

The color was going and coming on her cheek with nervousness.

"Do you also refuse to allow me to continue it? I am quite satisfied to do the talking and have you simply listen, for, since I converse well, and you do not, I prefer to have you remain silent."

"You baffle me. If I allow you to continue speaking, it is only because my curiosity is piqued, and I desire to learn *why* you are so wantonly rude to me to-day."

He smiled derisively; derision, too, seemed to be in his glance, when he answered:

"My rudeness is really a compliment. It presupposes that other men have so spoiled you with candied compliments that, in order to impress you, it is necessary to affect rudeness of speech."

"I'll waive that reason, since you must not believe that I am so simple-minded as to think it the true one. But if my conversation is really so little pleasing to you, why do you bother with me—waste your time on me?"

"Because you are a beautiful woman, perhaps the most perfectly beautiful woman I have ever seen. And because perfect beauty is always adorable, whether in a picture, a melody, a poem, a woman."

"The latter particularly?"

"Of course—the latter particularly, and I will tell you why. A beautiful woman has always an element of preciousness which other forms of beauty lack."

"I do not follow you," said Alice, off her guard again.

"I am glad you admit the limitations of your understanding."

She brushed that affront aside, lest, in noticing it, he begin to moralize on woman's vanity. She was horribly afraid, she found, of not only himself, but of his wit.

"Unless the element of preciousness you refer to," she

said, seeing that he did not offer to explain, "is that a beautiful woman is—well, always presents certain possibilities to a man."

Ulrich looked at her coldly. They might have been utter strangers, meeting for the first time, so aloof was the look with which he fixed her.

"How much more sensual-minded women are than men!" he said disdainfully. "Here we are, in the midst of an ethical dissertation, and you make a remark that is raw and banal."

Alice became very angry. She was so angry that she could not speak. Such anger, she thought, must propel the murderer.

What a beast he was! She was glad that she had refused him. But as she watched his dark, handsome face, looking into a corner of the room with the utmost placidity, she knew that she was not honest with herself. Heavens and earth—how she loved him!

Having finished lighting a cigarette, the doctor continued impassively:

"The element of preciousness I refer to as existing in a woman's beauty is its perishable quality. Take yourself, for instance. To-day you are a Venus. Twenty years hence you will either be as lean as a pole, or disagreeably fat. At any rate, you will be ungainly. Your hair will be streaked with gray, possibly it will be thin and partially reveal the scalp, and your contours, so exquisite and alluring to-day, will be ridiculous, repulsive, a matter of jest among the younger generation."

Tears arose in Alice's eyes. He was intolerable! No, suffer what she might, she would not let him see her cry. She would not afford him the satisfaction of gloating over the misery he inflicted. She spoke bravely, almost diffidently.

"To-day at least I am beautiful, and men do not ridicule me just yet—they adore me."

"How many of them?"

His chicanery was amazing. She turned and met his sneer.

"Oh, a few of them." She succeeded admirably in feigning the diffidence which she was far from feeling.

"Yes, a few—you are right, a few. Out of the hundreds of men you have met, how many have cared for you? And of those who have cared for you, how many have cared for you lastingly? Reflect upon this. It will depreciate your own good opinion of yourself."

Alice's wrath exploded. "I am by no means the conceited idiot you take me for," she said angrily. "I cannot help knowing I am beautiful. You yourself admit that, in spite of your effrontery."

"There you are again! Your beauty once more. It's a common-place by this time. But remember, the average man has so deformed an esthetic sense, an imagination so crippled, so degenerate and inactive, that supreme ugliness, ten to one, would fascinate him much more than perfect beauty. And I myself admit, if a woman could be found who would be the embodiment of ugliness, I believe, for the sake of variety, as a lash to my jaded appetite, she, not you——"

"I refuse to listen. Let us go on with the work."

"You refuse to listen because I depreciate your value. You will listen to anything but that."

The girl laughed hysterically. He was wearing her out. His resourcefulness was appalling. She felt herself unequal to continue the fencing bout. Yet she forced herself to say mildly:

"Wait until the next time you pay me a compliment and see whether that remark is justifiable."

"The next time I pay you a compliment? Have I then paid you so many? Certainly not to-day. And aren't you inviting a compliment from me now—just to prove, of course, that you won't listen?"

"Yes, of course," she said, hoping to take the wind out of his sails. "Of course, I am waiting eagerly for your next compliment."

"Well, how many have I paid you? You haven't answered that question."

"I really cannot clog up my memory trying to remember all your empty chatter."

He feigned a tremendous amazement.

"Positively, Alice, that's almost clever. Your wits are being sharpened by contact with mine."

"That is strange. Friction with so highly polished, keen an instrument as your brain, one would imagine would cut to wee little bits a poor little intellect like mine."

"Positively, that is clever."

"That is a compliment," she smiled. "I refuse to continue the conversation. To our work."

"No," he replied, regarding her fixedly, "I don't want to work. I'm sick to death of this everlasting medical paraphernalia. I have that with me every day in the year, day and night, but I cannot look at you, speak to you every hour of the day and night."

"Has it occurred to you how unpleasant it might be if I reported your impudence?"

"No, you wouldn't do that, Alice. You are too honest to report pilfering of sweets in which you yourself have participated."

"Are you obtuse enough to imagine I have enjoyed this morning?"

"Of course you have. I'm a novelty, if nothing else.

Confess, dearest, you have never met any one like me before."

She looked at him, he at her. She laughed. He had hoped she would fling herself into his arms, but her laugh told him that she was cool and self-contained. He decided to resort to desperate measures; his passion was blinding him; he forgot the place, the hour, forgot everything but that he loved her to madness. He caught her in his arms, and smothered her with kisses, his mouth travelling with inconceivable violence and rapidity over her lips, her cheeks, her eyes, her forehead, finally fastening themselves, like barnacles, like lichen, upon her throat, threatening to strangle her, to suffocate her, to choke her, like some deadly parasite.

She struggled against him in vain. Her strength was no match for his. Realizing the futility of her efforts, she abandoned herself to his kisses in a state of passivity, being neither hostile nor eager, wondering at her indifference.

Finally he set her free. He was prepared for a terrific outburst from her of some kind. But as he relinquished her, she suddenly realized the full import of her passivity—in cold blood she had felt no loathing of the violence he had displayed, no disgust at the virulence of his emotions. "I love him," she said to herself, with conviction. "If I did not, I would detest him after this."

All the while he was watching her furtively, wondering what she would do or say to vindicate her modesty, her virtue. He was disappointed.

She gathered up her few personal possessions, a silver pen-holder, a little pocket knife—he noted that she slipped the blade carefully into its sheath—and then went to the door. He, seeing her intention, arose, and got there before she did.

"Are you very angry?" he asked, seriously alarmed, his hand on the knob.

"I am not angry at all," she replied tranquilly.

Surprised, not understanding, somewhat cowed by her unruffled calm, he opened the door for her.

"That," she said calmly, "is the reason I shall never see you again."

CHAPTER VII

For the first time in her life, Alice rejoiced that she had a small independent income.

Securing her immediate dismissal from the hospital, on the plea of overwork and ill-health, she left New York within forty-eight hours for a small hotel in the country, where she had summered before. She was in a frame of mind which defies description. She no longer attempted to delude herself into believing that the situation, as far as her own affections were concerned, lay within her control. A perfect tempest of terror came over her at the mere thought of again encountering the doctor.

She had vaguely hoped that a change of scene might bring about a change of spirits. But she was in that morbid mental condition when direction of thought is no longer under control.

Everything reminded her of the man who had stormed her heart with such incredible swiftness. She could not look upon a certain pallid complexion, without thinking of him, or upon cream-colored shirts or striped neckties, or cloth of a certain design. She could not see a rose, but it reminded her of that memorable Sunday. A green tree recalled the wistaria pavilion. She could not, in brief, drag her thoughts away from him, no matter what she saw or where she was, and so it happened that the most inoffensive and irrelevant article became, to her excited imagination, deeply reminiscent of her lover.

Even the guests at the hotel failed to arouse her interest. The impact of Ulrich's personality upon her own

had been so pervasively powerful, he had impinged upon her so profoundly, that it surrounded her, as it were, with a crust, or coat of armor, which shut out the rest of the world effectually, and kept other personalities from making the slightest impression.

She spent a miserable fortnight. She thought at first that he would follow her, that, in some way, he would succeed in locating her. Mad thoughts came to her. Why, if he really loved her, did he not kidnap her? She imagined what she would have done if she had been a man.

One afternoon, on returning from a walk, she was greeted by the bell-boy with the news that a gentleman was waiting in the parlor to see her. He handed her a small envelope, which was sealed.

Breaking the envelope, she read:

"*Sylvia is very ill, and is asking incessantly for 'the beautiful blonde nurse.'* Please do me the courtesy to believe me. I am writing the truth. I entreat you to see me for five minutes. Ulrich."

It was possible, of course, that this was a mere subterfuge, but Alice believed that he had written the truth. Her heart was beating so madly that she could not go in to see him at once. So she stood in the hallway, apparently busy with another letter, but really seeking only to quell the tumult which had arisen within her.

At last she went into the room where he was waiting. She at once noticed the extraordinary pallor of his face, the gravity of his expression. He bowed and said:

"Thank you for seeing me. Sylvia is very ill indeed. You will remember the day we met the first time—you and she, you and I—she wanted you to promise that you would nurse her should she ever fall ill."

His voice was very humble. She felt within her a sort of fierce arrogance.

"I never intended to go out nursing," she replied almost insolently. "I took up nursing as a preliminary, breaking in for the study of medicine—because I wanted an occupation."

She was going to add that she had some means, but it struck her that in doing so she might sound a note of vulgarity; and she had no desire to appear a vulgarian in his eyes.

"I understand that," he answered in a most conciliatory tone. "Nor did we intend to ask you to do any of the actual nursing. All I ask, for Sylvia's sake, is that you come and supervise the other nurses, and remain with her when she is conscious, as a companion. She is very ill. It is pitiable to hear her beg for you."

Still Alice fenced and parried.

"The Baroness and I have met only once," she said. "How can she have such an overwhelming desire to have me near her? Surely she has friends, real friends, friends of her own rank, of her own class."

He did not reply, and Alice, finally forced, she knew not by what occult power, to raise her eyes, saw a pained expression in his face—an expression which was purely humane, and which had in it nothing of sex. She had not thought him capable of the kind-heartedness thus suddenly revealed. But instead of softening her, it only made her the harder, more supercilious, more keen to inflict pain on him. His dignity of manner irritated her.

"I am sorry," she said in a frigid, insincere voice, "that you are so worried about your cousin."

Still he did not speak. The air between them seemed almost to palpably pulsate, to vibrate audibly. Without an effort to veil her sarcasm, she said:

"You seem extremely grieved about her."

"I am extremely grieved," he replied without hesitation. "I am very fond of Sylvia. But I am more grieved about you than about her."

Alice colored. It was she who made no reply this time, but waited for him to continue. He went on:

"You have every right to doubt my word—if you wish to. I may have given you cause. I do not know. But you will pardon my telling you frankly that you should be enough of a woman to speak out and say so candidly, and not make yourself appear unwomanly, inhuman even, by showing yourself entirely unmoved on hearing of the serious illness of a woman, who, although she has not the pleasure and honor of being a friend of yours, has frequently expressed her desire to me to become your friend."

"And you dissuaded her from seeing me?" Alice suddenly interrupted.

"Naturally."

"You have the audacity to tell me that?"

"You seem to construe it as an insult."

"What else? A compliment?" she demanded viciously. He smiled bitterly.

"I would like to accuse you of lack of delicacy, Miss Vaughn, but, losing at the game with you——". He was speaking now with apparent effort—"Do you imagine how disagreeable the situation might have become for the three of us?"

Alice by this time was furious. She took no pains to disguise her anger.

"And if I had lost at the game," she retorted, "I suppose I would not have been a fit companion for your cousin."

"Pardon me," interrupted Ulrich. "You forget. I of-

ferred you marriage. I see no reason why my cousin and my wife should not be good friends. Nor do I see any reason why my cousin and my sweetheart should not have been good friends. But before I had secured your affection, gained you, you understand, as one or the other, the thought of meeting you in the presence of a third person, constrained by conventionality, was quite intolerable."

Alice was struck by the sincerity with which he spoke.

"You are right," she said slowly. "It would have been intolerable."

Having said this, she caught her breath quickly, for she realized that he would have been justified as construing them as an admission on her part. But he completely ignored the lead she had unwittingly given him.

"You have made a very deep impression upon Sylvia," he continued. "The matter simply resolves itself into this. I believe you to be a good, kind-hearted girl, and I do not believe that you are capable of deliberately doing an unkind action. If you refuse to go to Sylvia's bedside, I shall believe that you do so thinking that her illness is a lie. I cannot hope to convince you of the truth of my words. All I can do is to ask you to believe me."

Alice looked at him, leaning back against the mantel, the marble coldness of which chilled the heat of her head. In her blue eyes was an inflexible, steely look. He thought she was going to refuse. Instead she said simply:

"I will come."

"Thank you."

He arose.

"I voluntarily promise you that while you are under my roof I will trouble you in no way."

There was about him a spirit of abnegation, making him appear a stranger, making him seem inaccessible, aloof and distant.

From his pocket he drew a time-table and a railroad ticket. He placed them on the table, and pushed them across to her, thus avoiding the necessity of approaching her. She perceived with growing anger every little trait of his attempt at self-control.

"We are still in New York," he said. "There are trains every two hours. I am leaving on the seven o'clock train. I do not suppose you will wish to take that?"

The girl's eyes blazed with annoyance. She regretted having promised to go to Sylvia. His placidity annoyed her beyond measure. Seemingly, she was more agitated at meeting him again than he was. His demeanor was all decorum and ease. She forgot in the fever of the moment that while his coming had been a surprise to her, he had had time to prepare for this meeting. She remembered with a little thrill her curious tranquillity whenever he had become ardent through desire. Was she, conversely, to be plagued by passion when he, as at present, was serene and decorous? The thought so annoyed her that she neglected to reply to his inquiry. She repeated it, using precisely the same words which had offended her before.

"I do not suppose you will want to take the seven o'clock train?"

"Why not?"

She was aghast at her own audacity.

He looked at her without speaking. His eyes flashed fire; at times they had an angry gleam. Still he controlled himself.

Quickly she said:

"You evidently do not wish me to take the same train as yourself."

"Candidly, I do not," he answered abruptly.

His tone betrayed no inward agitation. He was Sphinx-like in his calm immobility. Her pride alone checked the outbreak of temper which seemed imminent.

"I shall be ready in time for the nine o'clock train," she said curtly.

The decisive ring of her own voice gave her courage. Determination filled her with an almost savage joy. At least she was paying him back in his own coin. Briefly, she continued:

"You will, I suppose, have a carriage waiting for me? I will also ask you to kindly see that a warm bath is ready for me when I arrive, or I shall be no good in my professional capacity after three hours on the train."

She was speaking authoritatively in a tone which might have been employed toward a refractory menial, scarcely to an upper servant.

She had expected him to flush, to answer her savagely, perhaps break out incoherently with more protestations of love. Perhaps she had hoped to invoke the latter. She hardly knew herself. Certainly she did not know the infinitesimal shades of character of the man she loved, and of the many weapons at his command. This time he chose sarcasm as his weapon.

"Madame la Princesse has but to command," he said, bowing low, a bow so obsequious that it was an anachronism in any one not costumed for the genuflection. "The bath shall be ready. What temperature does her Royal Highness desire?"

She had not believed him capable of submerging his gravity so completely; she had not believed him to be master of his emotions to the extent of indulging in inno-

cent tomfoolery. His facetiousness irritated her. She became more and more angry. It was sufficiently humiliating to have him come for her ostensibly for Sylvia's sake, really because he wanted her himself, but it was utterly insufferable to see him so self-contained and at ease, his mind so unruffled by passion as to be able to tease her. Tease her!

She tried hard to keep silent, because she felt that, in her present frame of mind, she would say something that would show him how deeply she was hurt. But the task was beyond her. The words fell from her lips:

"It will not be necessary to exact a promise that you will not even try to see me while I am nursing Sylvia. Your present indifference is a sufficient guarantee."

She saw him laugh. She did not hear the laughter for she was choking back the tears that were rising. How could she so betray herself! What a fool she was! How he would despise her for hurling herself back at him when evidently he had all but forgotten her—had remembered her only, more likely than not, because Sylvia was ill and clamored for her and must be indulged.

Her vision was blinded with the dew of unshed tears. She was trembling like an aspen leaf. Suddenly she felt that her trembling was forcibly stopped by a pair of strong arms which encircled her shoulders, and the next moment, her head resting on von Dette's shoulder, she was crying her heart out. She felt his mouth upon the nape of her neck—the same spot where he had kissed her before. His lips were voracious, seemed to eat into her flesh. He did not wait for her to finish her weeping, but bending back her head, kissed her wildly, tears and all upon lips, eyes, cheeks, upon her neck, upon her bosom through the thin white lingerie waist.

She struggled wildly to free herself yet she was too

fair-minded to blame him altogether. While she hated him for taking advantage of his opportunity, she would have hated him a hundred times more had he neglected to do so—had he allowed her to show her love without responding to it.

"How can I go with you after this?" she asked piteously.

"You have promised," he answered firmly.

"Will you keep out of my way as much as possible?" she asked. "For decency's sake, while Sylvia is ill?"

"For decency's sake," he assented gravely.

His face was calm and reasonable. She had never before seen the look of tenderness with which he regarded her now.

"What a sweet, pure little woman you are!" he said slowly.

"I'm not," she said sorrowfully, shaking her head.

He smiled, and shaking a finger warningly at her, he said:

"When Sylvia is well—then beware, beware!"

She was unnerved, fatigued, filled with lassitude, yet she found voice to mock him:

"When Sylvia is well, I shall have as little to fear as before she fell ill. I shall not have the pleasure of seeing you."

He pondered that. Evidently she was piqued at something. He was by no means obtuse, and after the scene he had just been through with her, it was not hard to guess that there was still unquenched a spark of jealousy, the existence of which he had not suspected. He spoke gravely, with admirable self-poise, and with a delicacy which in the case of ninety-nine women out of a hundred he would not have employed.

"I thank Sylvia's illness for bringing me to your door—

step so quickly," he said. "I would not have dared make overtures, or asked to see you so quickly but for this. I would have had to wait at least a month. I would have lacked the courage to approach you before."

"Then you must care more for Sylvia than for me," she chided him gently. "You dared do for her what you would not have dared do for me."

He assumed an excessively virtuous air.

"I dared appeal to the spiritual side of your character," he said. "I dared ask your assistance where I would not so soon have dared appeal to the emotional side of yourself."


She sat still, by no means convinced, still feeling a little pang of jealousy, not believing him absolutely, not mistrusting him wholly; yet admiring him whole heartedly.

Rising to go, he took a preliminary constitutional across the room.

"Tell me, Alice," he said. "Has it occurred to you that after all I may be faking—Sylvia's illness I mean—to get you into my power?" There was in his voice neither passion nor desire, merely a craving to understand her woman's mind. She answered as directly, feeling as if she were committing herself more than she had yet done, more even than when she had submitted to his violent caresses a moment before.

"You would not resort to such means. They are beneath you. You shall win me, any woman, on your own merit, or not at all. You are very sure of yourself. Perhaps, also, you do not care sufficiently for any particular woman—one woman being quite as good as another," she added with bitter playfulness.

He laughed delightedly to think she had remembered the poisoned shaft he had once directed to her heart.



He came back to her, and half kneeling beside her on the couch in which she was sitting, with the manner bred of intimacy, said:

"This one particular woman is worth every effort. You must have known right along, Alice, that I merely sought to torment you that last day. And I am not at all sure that if I were to fail at winning you on my own merits, I would not resort to foul means." He added gravely, "I have considered kidnapping."

"Kidnapping?" she started. She flushed crimson. Had he read her thoughts?

"Kidnapping," he said. "Would you hate me very much if I did? Of course you will say 'yes,' that you would hate me"—he paused tantalizingly.

Her blood sang in her veins. She remembered a wild dream she had had several nights before, remembered how, in that malignant dream, she had completely yielded herself to him. Her color deepened. He had never seen her blush so deeply before, and the deep rose-red of her cheeks gave her a strange, hectic, unnatural appearance, as if she had painted herself, or had inadvertently brushed her face against some adhesive coloring matter.

He saw her agitation and misunderstood it. He believed that he had blundered. "I must be more careful in the future," he muttered to himself. He was convinced he had outraged her sense of propriety or overtaxed her craving for the romantic. "I must respect her innocence," he said to himself, "her youth, her innocence and her nationality. Americans are likely to be strait-laced, unromantic." She had run away from him once because of his brutal, European manner of pressing his suit. He would take good care not to send her scurrying away from him again.

"I shall wait until the nine o'clock train and go down with you," he said, "that is, unless you insist on my going ahead, so that the courier may order the royal bath."

She smiled at this repetition of his sarcasm.

"Why this change of plan?" she demanded.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"What a child!" he laughed. "Before, at a distance, unkissed, unapproachable, in bad odor, could I have sat opposite to you for three miserable hours and talked platitudes and appeared at ease? Now, forgiven, it is very different. You have been in my arms, and shall be in my arms again." A danger signal in her face caused him to add hastily, "after Sylvia is better."

"I would not be too sure," she said.

"I am quite sure," he said, "that you will ultimately consent to be my wife."

She noted with pleasure the change of mental attitude that made him now present her future wifehood as a positive, not an optional, contingency.

In the train she begged him to acquaint her minutely with Sylvia's illness. Sylvia was down with typhoid, and Ulrich told her all she wanted to know. He was again amazed at the thoroughness of her medical knowledge as evinced by the questions she put to him.

When, after they had reached the house on Riverside Drive, she left him to go to her room, which was directly above his, he sat down to think matters over. Decidedly, he mused, she had as many facets as a finely-cut diamond. It was unthinkable that he could not ultimately win her. He would make every sacrifice. What did he care for the succession after all? What was the remote possibility of some day occupying the throne compared to obtaining such a jewel, such a peerless, flawless jewel as this girl? He would be able to devote him-

self wholly to medicine. His mind wandered on; his vision projected the future. She would be an ideal wife for him. He remembered Bacon's pithy remarks of what a wife should be—mistress in a man's youth, companion in middle life, nurse in old age. This pale, sweet girl would be all that, and much more!

"How I love her, how I love her!" He buried his face in his hands.

Alice, in the room above his, was moving about. He heard her shoes fall upon the floor—heard her move the chair, shift the bed—heard the bed creak.

His ecstatic mood vanished, swept away as by a hurricane. His blood became turbulent. It was impossible for him to remain in his room, so near her, with only the ceiling between them, to hear her move about, in the stillness of the night, to know that her pure, sweet, white body was stretched at full length upon the bed.

Springing from his chair, he hurried from the room. Two steps at a time, as if pursued by the Furies, he ran down to the lower floor, and into his library. He took down a volume on medicines, and sought to give his undivided attention to the book. But his hand trembled so that he could not hold the volume steadily. He read words, read them out loud, making a terrible effort to understand them, but his vision was blurred, his brain seemed a furnace, his body was enveloped in flames; the air in the room seemed to beat upon him as a hammer.

The thought came to him to leave the house, to call for a cab, to seek out elsewhere what was denied him here. But a revulsion of feeling followed. He wondered at himself. He was amazed at the change that had been wrought in him by this white-faced, pale-haired girl. A month ago he would have thought nothing of such an exploit. Now it occurred to him that contact with any

other woman would be indescribably revolting, disgusting, a loathsome thing. He had never been faithful to any woman; the thought had never as much as occurred to him. If anyone had suggested it he would have laughed it to scorn as quixotic, absurd, impossible. Now it seemed to him that to enter upon a *liaison*—even a temporary one—with any other woman would be to rub the bloom off his attachment for Alice; that he would be debasing her by accepting a substitute in any one of the many relations in which she would stand to him—that he would be robbing her in some occult way, if he were to take into his arms some other woman.

There was only one thing to do—to suffer. A certain exultation descended upon him. Bitter and cruel as was this suffering, it was an unbelievably sweet thing that was happening to him—to him, the seasoned, cynical, callous man of the world.

For the first time in his life he regretted his past life. It had always been his contention that a man must live a man's life before marrying—should know all there is to be known—the depths and the heights. But now, as he kept his lonely, painful vigil through the small hours of the morning, he realized poignantly that heretofore he had known the depths only—never the heights—that the intoxication this or that woman had afforded him in the past had been ephemeral merely, satisfying the senses, but never warming the heart or inspiring the spirit to unwonted flights.

He wished that he might have been able to offer Alice a body as undefiled as her own. He almost desired that he might have an unsophisticated mind to offer her as well, ignorant of all the horrible wisdom such as the Tree of Knowledge imparts.

He rejoiced to think that in Alice he would win a

woman who would restrain the brutality of his own lower nature. He desired to restrain his sensuality, to win her only gradually as she gave herself. He rejoiced that she had the power to spiritualize his passion. So keen was his exaltation, that for the hour he forgot his favorite axiom, "When in man a desire for moral reform sets in, mental disintegration begins."

Dawn crept slowly out of the ebon embrace of night, suffusing the sky with rosy pink. Ulrich gazed out over the river through the open window. An enormous peace descended upon him. He felt his passion subsiding. As if in prayer, he folded his hands, resting his chin on his fingers.

How he loved her! How he loved her!

Without he heard her footsteps. They were muffled, hushed, distant; now they pattered on the marble of the tiled hall, now they were extinguished by the heavy Axminster rugs which lay upon the hall-floor. Gradually she came nearer. He went to the door and bade her good-morning.

CHAPTER VIII

There was attached to the von Dette household a stout, middle-aged, supercilious and very important woman by the name of von Schwellenberg. Miss Smith, the trained nurse, who had attended Sylvia alone before Alice came, declared that Frau von Schwellenberg was the bane of her life. It appeared she had ordered Miss Smith about as if she were a servant. Miss Smith certainly was not a servant. No trained nurse would submit to be treated as if she were a servant. This and more Miss Smith confided to Alice in the first half hour of their acquaintance, and indeed, the young girl had only to see the two together to perceive that Miss Smith's charge was well-founded. She anticipated similar treatment at Frau von Schwellenberg's hands, and wondered just what she would do or say if the German "meal-bag," Miss Smith's irreverent designation for the fat little lady, ordered her to carry in the warm water for Sylvia's sponge bath, instead of allowing the maid to take it in, which, it appeared, was the outrage committed by Miss Smith.

On the morning of Alice's advent the housemaid came to the door of Sylvia's apartment with the hot water. She was an Irish girl, and in a very strong brogue requested Alice to come to the door for the pitcher, as the "fat old woman" did not permit her to enter. Alice turned to Frau von Schwellenberg with a question in her eyes.

"My dear young lady," said the meal-bag, "just look

at that girl. The etiquette of a self-respecting Court would not permit such a servant to enter the room of the Princess."

"I see," said Alice, contriving to get her hands smeared with some ointment.

"You must take it from her," continued Frau von Schwellenberg pleasantly.

"Then I do not contaminate?"

"*Du lieber Gott in Himmel*, no."

The von Schwellenberg was all honey and cloves.

"Then," said Alice calmly, "I suppose you don't either. Will you take it from her? My hands are very dirty just now, as you can see."

Von Schwellenberg glared. She was frightful to look upon when she glared. She bade the housemaid put down the pitcher and go. Alice, fussing about to kill time, watched out of a corner of her eye. She saw the fat old lady wobble to a wash-basin, take a piece of soap, work it to a lather on an old wash-rag, and with this lather scrub the handle of the pitcher, where the housemaid had touched it. Then she rinsed the handle. Drying it carefully, and puffing and panting from the unwonted exertion of bending for so long a time, for the pitcher had remained on the floor, she carried it into the room.

When Alice uncovered Sylvia to give her her sponge-bath, the von Schwellenberg again interrupted.

"Pardon me," she said, "etiquette prescribes that before any liberty is taken with the person of a Royal Highness, these words must be spoken, 'If your Highness permits.'"

"But she is unconscious," the nurse remonstrated.

"*'She'* My dear young lady, you mean to say '*Her Highness*' is unconscious."

The fat old woman looked very much like a strutting hen as she uttered the last words.

Alice laughed. She felt an ungodly desire to shock this clumsy, tradition-ridden old creature.

"Life is too short," she said flippantly, as she began preparations upon Sylvia's prostrate and unconscious body. "But I haven't the least objection if you will stay near me and pronounce the phrases prescribed by the etiquette of your Court. I suppose it doesn't really matter who says them," she concluded innocently, "so long as they're spoken at the right time, like the answers of the congregation to the minister in the Episcopal service."

The von Schwellenberg glared again. Also she bristled, bristled so perceptibly that her very clothes seemed to grow stiff and hard.

"I shall have to submit this to Prince Ulrich," she said. Then, a little vindictively, "I do not mind telling you that His Highness has instructed me to show you the greatest consideration, the greatest respect—yes, respect—but that does not imply, I suppose, that I am to tolerate your refusing the respect you owe the Princess."

"By all means," said Alice "confer with His Highness."

His Highness apparently had nothing particular to say in the matter, for the von Schwellenberg never referred to court etiquette again. But one day, in her usual saccharine way, she said, apropos of nothing in particular, "His Highness seems very partial to you."

Henceforward she treated the new nurse with every consideration. Ignorant as Alice was of foreign ways, she could not but notice the deference paid to her by all the European servants, and Ulrich and Sylvia had brought quite a retinue with them. The von Schwellenberg also deigned to chat familiarly with Alice when-

ever there was time, and one day, when the young girl picked up the photograph of a young man in the uniform of a Black Hussar, who resembled Ulrich amazingly, the "meal-bag" volunteered the information, "That is Prince Gunther."

"Prince Gunther?" echoed Alice. Sylvia when delirious had frequently called upon Gunther.

Old Schwellenberg looked wise.

"He and the Princess are in love."

"Is he also a von Dette?"

"Yes, he is another cousin, a grandson of the old King's brother."

Alice put down the photograph.

"But she will not marry him," the von Schwellenberg continued, "Princess Sylvia has one fault—she is inordinately ambitious. She hopes Prince Eitel Egon, the *Erbprinz*, will die—yes, yes, she does wish it—do not look so startled—and then she wants Prince Ulrich, who is next in succession, to marry her. Everybody knows it."

Alice feigned indifference, but she had the strange sensation of having been told all this for a purpose. What ulterior object could the old lady-in-waiting have had in repeating this gossip? Her face turned crimson. She wanted to ask what view Prince Ulrich took of the matter, but she felt it was impossible to discuss him with a third person. Besides, had he not told her that a marriage between himself and Sylvia was not to be thought of?

One morning, at about four o'clock, Alice was awakened by a noise which she could not understand. Hurriedly slipping on a wrapper, she ran down to Sylvia's room to see if anything was amiss. She found Miss Smith, who had the night-watch, dozing lightly in a chair near Sylvia's bed. She was wide awake in a moment.

No, she had heard nothing. The Princess had slept quietly all night. Alice waited a moment to hear whether there would be a repetition of the sound, but the house was still as a tomb, and after five minutes, Alice crept upstairs silently to her own room.

On entering it she immediately became aware of another presence, and she was aware that a candle had been snuffed at that very moment. For one instant her heart stood still with fear. Who was in the room? Her first impulse was to cry out, but thought of the patient was second nature to the trained nurse, and she checked the cry that had half risen to her lips. Was it a burglar? Some occult sense told her it was not a thief, and her heart began palpitating wildly as the thought flashed upon her that it might be Ulrich. Would he so far forget all the instincts of the gentleman? She did not know. His eyes had flashed fire the previous day on encountering her unexpectedly. Had he entered her room hoping to surprise and frighten her into acquiescence? She could not believe it.

"Who is it?" she demanded faintly. There was no reply, and she repeated the question more vigorously. Again she received no answer. Her pulse began to throb tumultuously. She was terrified. She could not believe Ulrich would dare to do this, and yet she was almost certain it was he. For one moment the power of speech seemed to leave her. Then weakly, not realizing at all what a very unwise thing she was saying, she called out:

"Ulrich, is it you?"

The answer came: "It is I, Freiherrin von Schwellenberg."

The blood rushed back to Alice's face. In a flash she realized into what a horribly compromising position her

mention of Ulrich's name had placed her. What a fool she was in thus allowing herself to be trapped. For trap she was sure it was.

The "meal-bag," who in *déshabille* doubly and trebly deserved the name, struck a match and lit the candle which she herself had brought into the room.

"May I inquire how you came into my room at this hour?" demanded Alice, trembling with anger.

"I heard a sound. *Du lieber Gott in Himmel*, how pale you are! Come, sit down."

She drew forward a chair, but Alice refused it with an imperious gesture of the hand.

"Close the door," she said briefly. "The entire house need not be awakened by your explanation."

The von Schwellenberg gave the girl a quick, searching look and closed the door.

"I heard a sound," she began again. "I went into the hall and listened. As you know, my room is opposite to yours. I heard some one going downstairs. I did not dare strike a match, thinking it a burglar, but when you got to the landing I recognized you."

She stopped.

"Continue, if you please," said Alice coldly.

"I went back to my room. I listened for you to return. I feared you might be ill. I thought I heard you come upstairs. I called into your room in a whisper to ask if I could be of service and received no reply. So I walked in."

She smiled bovinely as she uttered the last words.

Alice realized that this was no moment for cowardly prudence, and that, to save herself as far as she could in this woman's eyes, she must take the bull by the horns.

"You are quite sure," she said icily, "that you did not think I had gone downstairs on a very different mission

—that I had gone downstairs to spend the remainder of the night in the room directly under mine.”

“Du lieber Gott in Himmel!”

The fat old lady ripped out her favorite expletive. Comic dismay was painted on her fat countenance, and rouge being absent, she presented a ludicrously torpid appearance. She was an enormous woman. She was dressed in a thin muslin night-gown that reached only to her knees. Her feet were thrust into bathing slippers, and her fat, veined legs were bare. She had wound a thin India silk shawl about her hips—one could not guess whether for warmth or vanity. Altogether she was as ludicrous a spectacle as anyone would want to see.

“Will you not at least permit me to sit down?” she asked, throwing back her head with a gesture she used when using her lorgnette.

She was the grande dame very suddenly, in spite of her ridiculous attire.

“I am an old woman,” she went on with something like pride, “and it is difficult for me to stand when not laced up.”

Alice pushed a chair over to her.

“You have never before asked my permission to sit,” remarked the young girl with a serenity which equalled the placid temper of her visitor. “I cannot guess why you do it now.”

By this time she was sufficiently familiar with that bugbear, court etiquette, to realize that the sudden assumption of humility by this woman, whose rank was high, boded something portentous.

The von Schwellenberg did not reply. Alice, clad in a pink silk kimono, which, being too short, revealed her bare limbs as shamelessly as her visitor’s, was seated on

the bed. From this point of vantage, bowing as ceremoniously as if she had been in full ball regalia, she said politely:

"You have not yet informed me of the reason of your change of front."

The old lady became excited at last.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she cried, "what are you quarrelling about, *meine Gnaedigste*? Naturally I will not sit down without permission in the presence of a young lady who enjoys the distinction of calling His Royal Highness by his first name."

There was no malice in old Schwellenberg's voice as she made this statement, only a look of singular deference, almost of homage. Alice felt a strong inclination to laugh. To be respected by this fat, etiquette-crazy old woman because she suspected that Ulrich was her lover!

Again in thought she had used his first name, and instantly aware of it, she became intolerably nervous. At all hazards she must clear her reputation. So far she was innocent, and she would remain so.

Quietly she said:

"You will have to believe me when I tell you I have no right to call His Highness by his first name."

"But you will have soon," said von Schwellenberg consolingly. Nodding her head vigorously, she went on, "I am quite certain of that. He is much in love with you. *Sehr verliebt. Ach was!* I knew it the first time I saw him in the same room with you. A blind man could have seen it, and I am a woman with very good eyesight. He is crazy about you. If you have not yet won him, you must not despair."

Alice smiled in spite of herself. The viewpoint was so absurdly preposterous.

"I assure you, Frau von Schwellenberg, I have no desire to win the Prince or any other man."

"That I believe; you are a good woman, but he has a desire to make you love him. He will succeed. Ulrich von Dette is not a man to sigh in vain."

She herself sighed most tragically.

Alice's conscience pricked her. It was horrible to think that she actually had an inclination to do the very thing with which von Schwellenberg charged her. She replied determinedly:

"He will not succeed."

She was very nervous, because she was uncertain of the truth of her words. The night air was chill. She shivered.

"What then will you do?" The old woman's voice was rasping, exacting. "You are very beautiful; your mirror tells you that. Rather than have a royal lover, will you marry some odious business man whom you happen to nurse through some sickness? *Ach was!* You do not know what it means to be a royal favorite! You will be envied by everyone. Everyone will bow to you, men and women of rank, ministers of state, princes of the blood even. You will be created a Baroness or a Freifrau or something to enable you to appear at Court and to take precedence of other women of the old nobility but of lower rank. *Ach, mein Gott!* what can I say to convince you not to throw away the good fortune which is offered you?"

Alice was turning hot and cold by turns. She sought refuge in sarcasm.

"If all the favorites of royalty are still given titles," she said, "I wonder that the Almanach de Gotha is not twice as long as it is."

"You are witty," said von Schwellenberg. "I did not

speaking of the vermin, the *Gesinde*, women whose trade is that of the courtesan. I speak of women like you, women of beauty, of intellect, of presence, of personality—*mein Gott!* what a personality you have—you who made old Freifrau von Schwellenberg perform a menial's work! Never shall I forget that I carried the hot water for you!"

Alice laughed. The von Schwellenberg looked so preposterous in her short muslin night-dress, and bare, blue-veined legs; the entire scene was so bizarre that she could not suppress her sense of humor.

"Think it over carefully," continued the old lady-in-waiting. "Do not say 'no' too quickly. Even if you do not care for him very much."

"But I do."

The words seemed to leap out of the young girl's mouth. She was half frantic with the torture the conversation was inflicting.

"You care for him?" stammered Frau von Schwellenberg.

The girl became reckless.

"I am mad for him," she cried.

The panther, or the tiger, or whatever other name one chose to give the animal that had lain dormant in her so long, struggled rampantly into life. She thought that those who see madness approaching, see it and cannot escape, must feel as she was feeling.

"You are mad for him?" old von Schwellenberg repeated. "And you think of refusing him? You are joking. Surely, you do not expect him to marry you?"

And before Alice could disavow her intention of capturing Prince Ulrich in marriage, the old woman, who had become terribly agitated, continued:

"Marriage would be so foolish for both of you. At

present he is *the* great man in Hohenhoff-Hohe. The old King has been controlled by him for years. He will be the Regent of the young King when the old King is dead. If he marries you regularly, he will not be Regent. He will be what we call a zero—*eine Null*—nothing. It would be too cruel."

Quickly the girl said:

"I love him too dearly to want him to marry me. I am not thinking of myself. I am thinking of him."

"*Ach Gott!*" cried the von Schwellenberg, "*wie romantisch!*" She sighed. "You are charming, Miss Vaughn! You are wonderful! Ah, what life you will inject into our selfish, phlegmatic little Court! An unselfish favorite! It has never been. You will achieve the impossible. You must accept! You must!"

Alice felt she must terminate the conversation. She felt ill and nauseated from sheer nervousness.

"Freiherrin," she said, "I beg of you to discontinue this conversation."

The old woman arose and hobbled to the door. "I am going," she said. "Only one word more. Count on old von Schwellenberg as your most devoted servant and friend. Command me when and how you will and rely on my discretion."

Attempting a deferential bow, which Alice, blinded with tears, did not even see, she left the room.

CHAPTER IX

Ulrich certainly behaved admirably all through Sylvia's illness. But such is the inconsistency of human nature, that Alice was both irritated and annoyed because he faithfully held to the conduct she herself had prescribed for him. He made no attempt to see her privately. If she entered a room in which he happened to be, he attempted no conversation, held open the door for her so she could majestically walk forth, treated her with the most marked courtesy.

His conduct caused her to speculate on his motives. At first she was pleased; a few days later she was annoyed; still later, she believed he meant to pique her into giving him some lead. Finally she concluded that seeing her in daily close proximity had disillusioned him and that he did not intend to renew his wooing.

If she had been madly in love with him before, now her passion became a tempest, a perfect hurricane that swept over her at mere thought of him. She was more dazzled than ever by his perfect courtesy, which he had never before displayed so conspicuously. Von Schwelkenberg's words also had not failed of their effect.

Her patient was already convalescent when one evening in the dim twilight of the hall she and Ulrich collided. He caught her from slipping on the marble floor, but instead of releasing her, encircled her waist with his arm. In the semi-darkness his eyes appeared luminous, almost like the quick glints of light that glimmer on flowing water in the moonlight.

"Don't, don't!" she murmured vaguely, faint from the sudden encounter, the unexpected contact with his hands, his breath, his skin.

"Haven't I behaved well?" he whispered ardently. "Am I not to get my reward at last? Let me kiss you, please."

"No, no," she murmured, feeling his kisses would be intolerable. She lowered her head, threw it from one side to the other to escape his mouth, which was greedy, voracious, half open, like the mouth of a child eagerly expecting a visible yet delayed sweetmeat.

He laughed and spoke in a low, caressing voice.

"I will hold you until you surrender with good grace."

"No, no, Ulrich! Some one will see us."

"Never mind, Sweetheart." His white teeth flashed like the petal of a magnolia blossom. "I do not mind your compromising me in the least."

Alice laughed. He had waited for this. He stooped quickly and crushed his lips against hers, holding her head with one hand so she could not escape him. Never before had he held her so firmly, never before had she experienced such rapture at being encircled by his arms.

He released her at last, but not before he had whispered:

"When, Alice? When?"

"Never, never!" she said determinedly.

"You must realize that you cannot give yourself one moment, as you have given yourself just now, and refuse yourself the next moment," he protested.

"I did not yield myself. But you—oh, you're a cyclone!"

"Very well. Then you mean you yield only to cyclones and similar convulsions of nature?"

There was a menace in his tone that frightened her.

"I didn't mean that," she said fearfully.

Bending over her, he whispered ardently:

"You cannot escape me. If you wish to prolong the chase a little longer, very well. But you will be mine sooner or later." Then stepping aside and bowing, he added: "I will not detain you longer."

The next instant she was alone. After this Alice realized that she must either leave the von Dette household without an explanation, or meet the issue squarely. Her sleep became troubled; she lost her appetite; a nervous unrest possessed her. And judging from the deep hollows under his eyes, she knew it must be the same with Ulrich.

Sylvia was rapidly regaining her health. She had taken a great fancy to Alice and treated her more as a friend than as a nurse. She insisted in calling her by her first name, and on Alice's reciprocating. One day she asked her whether she would be willing to go abroad with her.

"If you do not care to come as my avowed companion," she said, "I hope you will at least pay us a good long visit this winter at Hohen. Hohen is our *Residenz*, our capital, you know, and I can promise you our Court is as lively during the season as any in Europe.

Alice thanked her, but declined the invitation. Sylvia became pressing, even urgent, and positively refused to take a final "no." When the nurse left the room for a few moments to prepare a milk punch, old von Schwelkenberg took advantage of her absence to say:

"Princess, surely it cannot be your intention to get Prince Ulrich to marry this girl, charming though she be! I implore you to consider the honor of your name, of your race, and not to sacrifice it to your own ambitions."

"Dear old Schwellie," replied the princess with a significant smile, "Don't you think I have as much regard for the honor of our house as you have?"

Von Schwellenberg grumbled.

"As for marriage," the princess continued lightly, "I am afraid the redoubtable Ulrich will marry no one, not even me."

At that moment Alice reëntered, and Frau von Schwellenberg, snorting and furious because of the snub she had received, left the room.

Still very weak, Sylvia asked Alice to let her rest her head on her shoulder until she fell asleep.

Twilight was rapidly falling. The room was perfectly quiet with the heavy stillness peculiar to large houses in aristocratic neighborhoods. There was something oppressive, even unhealthy, in the unnatural peace. There was not a fly, not a mosquito to disturb the ear, only the distant rumbling of a wagon or the rapid chug-chug of a far-away automobile suggested the busy life of the big city. The flowers, which had been fresh and sweet in the morning, were already beginning to decay. A strange, tropical, morbid odor emanated from them, making the air in the room stifling, thick, unclean.

Sylvia was asleep at last, and Alice, still holding her, was drowsy from the stillness and the heat of the room. Suddenly she became wide and painfully awake. It seemed to her that it was not Sylvia's head that was resting upon her shoulder, upon her bosom, but Ulrich's. They were alone; it was night.

She slid Sylvia's head upon the pillow and noiselessly crept from the room. Outside, panting, choking, she stood half fainting, muttering to herself, "It cannot go on like this. I must meet him squarely. But how will it end?"

CHAPTER X

Again they met in the hall—accidentally. The door to his study was open. He had just lit a small red lamp which he burned all evening, whether he was in the room or not.

He looked at her keenly, and without making an effort to kiss her, as she expected, he said:

"I would like to have a talk with you. Will you come into the library?"

She made no reply, but followed him. A certain sanctity seemed to envelop him. Never before had he appeared so reserved, never before had she perceived such an undercurrent of tenderness as now appeared in his attitude. But she did not know, perhaps he did not know himself, that his manner was a superb piece of unconscious acting. He had never been less sincere or less genuine with her. Everything he was about to say had been carefully premeditated.

"You must realize," he began gravely "that things cannot go on as at present. It is not necessary to particularize, but you must realize that I have endured torture during the past few weeks."

She did not answer, but he perceived that she was trembling from head to foot, not violently, but as if wave upon wave of emotion were traversing her. She was still standing, supporting herself against the mantel. He drew up a chair.

"You had better sit down," he said; "we have a long talk before us."

She obeyed him mechanically, and he perceived that she was not thinking of him, but of something else, possibly of something he had said. He would like to have known what was agitating her so profoundly. The exalted mood in which he had found himself on the evening of her arrival had completely passed. Even his desire not to be faithless to her had assumed the complexion of mere hedonism, seemed merely to proceed from a wish not to blunt his joy in her. His favorite axiom, "When a desire for moral reform begins, mental disintegration sets in," again had his endorsement. Lust of conquest was uppermost. He was determined not to lose her. If she was to be gained in no other way, he had ultimately and finally decided to marry her. But he felt that if he lacked the wit to gain her without marriage, that if his brain pitted against hers were to prove the less clever of the two, he would never be able to take full delight in his possession of her, for he was keen enough to know that it must be a case of brain conquering brain, and not senses subjugating senses, if he desired to hold her. And that realization stung him into putting forth every effort to win her.

Like a lawyer about to argue his case in court, he had carefully prepared himself. He had rehearsed the facts and arguments to be presented to her. Like all good extempore speakers, he preferred to rely upon the inspiration of the moment for selecting the most formidable and adequate raiment in which to clothe his arguments, for to him arguments were like human beings, the impression they made depended largely on their style.

"Alice," he said, "don't you realize that you must be fair with me, and give me a definite answer?"

She looked at him questioningly. Before she spoke,

he knew what she was going to say, and he quailed. He had not expected she would dare to be so direct.

"Before I can answer you, Ulrich, I must know what you are asking me. You ask me to be fair with you; then be honest with me; what are you asking me to be—your wife, or——"

"I have told you, Alice, not once, but a dozen of times, that if you have an insuperable aversion to living with me as my sweetheart, I will marry you. But marriage would mean the giving up of many advantages to which my rank entitles me, and in which you would participate. I am not thinking only of myself in preferring that we should be lovers instead of man and wife. I have explained to you what a morganatic marriage is. I will not marry you that way. It must either be a full and regular marriage, which would mean that I must renounce my rights to the succession, or—the other. It is for you to say which."

Nervously she laced and interlaced her fingers. Slowly she answered:

"I will not accept your sacrificing everything for me," she said at last, "nor can I consent to—to—the other way."

"It will have to be one or the other, I will not give you up. Make up your mind to that. You will not leave this room until I have your answer. If you say that I must make the sacrifice, well and good, I will make it. I do not deny it will be hard on me, for I love my beautiful country very dearly; I am proud of my rank and all it means; I have been brought up to believe that high rank carries with it high obligations, which in my case, as Prince Regent, during my cousin's minority, I shall be called upon to discharge in the near future. I am placed in a very unfortunate position; I must either

be renegade in my duty to my country, or in my duty to the woman I love. But I will not give you up. If your Puritan blood makes it impossible for you to come to me without marriage, then I will have to be a renegade to my country. But you I must have, Alice. Answer me, which is it to be?"

"I cannot decide," she said in a low tone. She was trembling from head to foot. "I cannot decide," she repeated. "Ulrich, I will leave the decision to you. I trust you. Whatever you say I will do."

"No, Alice, I cannot do that. If I were to decide against marriage, and I am frank in saying that my inclination lies that way, you might later on reproach me, or worse still, you might feel a resentment against me without voicing it, thinking that I had taken advantage of your innocence. All I can do is this. I can ask you to make this great sacrifice for me. You say you trust me. You will never regret doing that, Alice. I shall prove myself worthy of your faith. Well?"

She did not answer, but sat looking at him with large, frightened eyes. He saw how miserably she was suffering, and he pitied her. His self-possession almost melted away under the look of those innocent, trusting blue eyes.

"Well?" he asked again.

"You must think me very weak, Ulrich. I do not want you to shirk your duty on my account, but I have been brought up to consider what you are asking me to contemplate as the cardinal sin. I have been brought up to believe that it is worse than thievery, more degrading than murder. Oh, Ulrich, I cannot decide. I am so very, very miserable."

The tears stood in her eyes.

"If you cannot take a different viewpoint of it," he said, "I certainly would not consent to your sacrificing

yourself. I certainly would not wish you to feel that you were degrading yourself on my account. There is much work waiting for me in Hohenhof-Hohe. But let the poor continue to go unfed, let the schools continue to be inadequate and insufficient—what does it matter to you and me? We shall marry, Alice, and be selfishly happy, and not think of the thousands of persons whom we have sacrificed so that we may be happy.”

“No, no, Ulrich,” she cried piteously. “I cannot, I will not let you fail in your duty to your country like that.”

With sudden passion, he went on:

“Don’t you see, dear, that it is the feeling that binds heart to heart which lowers or exalts us, and not the miserable little fact whether the marriage ceremony had been performed or not? I love you, I adore you; no marriage ceremony, no civil or religious marriage, could make you more my own than if you come to me this way. Before God, Alice, you would be my wife!”

“Why do you say before God?” she interrupted. “You should at least be sincere with me, and you are not sincere when you speak of God. You do not believe in God.”

Too clever to waste energy in futile denial, Ulrich continued suavely:

“When anyone who no longer believes in the Deity uses the word ‘God,’ it is neither a mark of insincerity nor a reverting to type. Rather is the word employed as a metaphor. It is imagery of a sublime sort. The word is used to summarize all the finer, spiritual forces in us.”

She was struck by the reply as he could see. As he had invented the retort on the spur of the moment, he felt all the pride of the creative artist.

But so far he had not progressed a single step nearer his goal. He was wondering in what way it would be best to proceed, when she burst out:

"Oh, Ulrich, do you not realize what a coward I am? Why don't you do something desperate, and put an end to our misery?"

It was the first time she had acknowledged her own condition of mind. Quick to see his advantage, he said:

"I have done nothing desperate because I would not as much as kiss you, unless I knew you were willing. I love you, and I desire your love and esteem, not your fear and contempt. I believe I love you a great deal more than you love me."

Alarmed by his tone of certainty, she looked up at him anxiously. He continued boldly, knowing he was staking all upon this last card.

"Yes—I love you more than you love me. I have repeatedly offered to make the great sacrifice for you—to marry you. But you are not willing to make the great sacrifice for me, of living with me without being my wife."

The words stung every fibre of her woman's pride.

"I don't ask you to make a sacrifice," she retorted quickly. "I would not accept your name, would not be willing to bear it, if it is such a sacrifice to give it to me."

He had partly foreseen her anger. It was part of his plan.

"Alice," he said in a mildly reproachful tone, "you are very unreasonable. We are extraordinarily situated, you and I. One of us must make a sacrifice, either I of my rank and of its appanages, or you of your—how shall I designate it?—foolish notions concerning virtue. You are not willing to make the sacrifice, yet permit me to

point out to you that your sacrifice is an intangible one, concerning itself merely as it does with feelings and beliefs, while mine is a renunciation of very palpable advantages. If you were willing to make the sacrifice for me, I would accept it, because it is my honest conviction that my retention of the advantages which I enjoy, thanks to my exalted birth, will make life more radiantly beautiful not only for me, but for you as well. And if you had given me the chance to accept your sacrifice, I would have thanked you from the bottom of my heart and cheerfully acknowledged my indebtedness to you, for I fully realize that although your notions seem obsolete and a trifle foolish, yet to you they appear to be the very cloth of gold and ermine in which your soul is robed. But it seems to be decreed that I, and not you, are to make the sacrifice, and I will gladly, willingly and cheerfully make it. Nor, since it offends you, shall I ever refer to it again. And now that the matter is settled, let us say no more about it, dearest."

She had left her chair, as he began unfolding his diabolical casuistry, and had seated herself in a remote corner of the room as if to escape from his immediate proximity. He could see, as he watched her furtively, that his words were not merely sinking deep into her soul, but were lacerating her very flesh. She not merely heard him speak—she *felt* his words.

When he stopped speaking, she arose and walked straight to him. By the look in her face he knew that victory was his. She was aglow and afire with the flame of her renunciation.

"Ulrich, Ulrich," she said in a low, passionate voice, putting both her arms about his neck. It was the first time she had ever offered him a caress, and a tremor of pride, of exultation swept through him.

"I shall not accept your sacrifice. The sacrifice shall be mine. I have been selfish, heartless, stupid. I did not understand you, dear. I see it all so plainly now. Forgive me—and take me!"

He passed his arm about her waist, and at the same moment she buried her face against his shoulder.

Now, in the moment of his supreme triumph, a feeling of inexpressible alarm came over him. As he held her, her one arm still clinging about his neck, it seemed to him that the future was unrolled before him. He felt a foreboding that he would never be able to disentangle himself from the silken web he himself had helped weave. He almost regretted his triumph. And yet he had been determined to marry her, failing to win her otherwise. But marriage, he felt in some indeterminate, unanalyzed way, would not have bound him to her so inviolably, so ruthlessly as he was being bound because she was yielding herself. She was doubtless waiting for him to kiss her; she had a right to expect it. He put his lips upon the nape of her neck, and at contact with the soft, cool flesh, all his love for her came pulsing back, sweeping before it every other consideration.

"Alice, Alice!"

She lifted her head from his shoulder, and of one accord they went to the couch and sat down upon it, together, side by side.

"You will not regret it, Alice?"

"No, Ulrich."

"You are quite sure?"

"I am glad it is settled. Don't let us discuss it any more. I am so weary of all this talk."

"Very well, dear. Where shall we spend our honeymoon?"

Her eyes dropped.

"Wherever you wish, Ulrich," she said in a soft, low voice.

"Mountains or seashore?"

"Is it quite immaterial to you?"

"Quite. I wish you to choose."

"Let us go to the mountains. Don't you love the lofty serenity, Ulrich, of the mountain atmosphere? And the wonderful sunsets that last for almost two hours in midsummer?"

"Very well, dear, I know of a beautiful place. I hope I can get it. I shall telegraph to-night."

Her eyes met his with an inquiry.

He bent forward and whispered:

"Sylvia sails a week from yesterday, at five in the morning. I shall manage to sprain my ankle, so that at the last moment she will have to sail alone. You will see her off the night before. We will start early the next morning, which will give us ample time to motor all the way. The roads are splendid. We shall reach our destination by five in the afternoon."

She smiled, and without speaking, kissed him on the lips. Then she leaned her head against his shoulder. Suddenly she said:

"Ulrich, you are not as happy as I am. Why not?"

"You are happier because you are making the sacrifice."

He spoke the first words that came into his head, but after he had spoken it occurred to him that there was a good deal of truth, and not only of truth but of sincerity, in his words. Nervousness swept over him again in a torrential wave. Never again would he be the same cynical, cold-blooded man of the world that he had been two months ago.

"Ulrich, I don't see how I can get ready in five days. I have my trousseau to get, you know."

"Oh, never mind about getting much. A few frocks, a lingerie gown or two, something substantial to motor in, or get nothing new at all. We shall be quite by ourselves, you know, so we won't have to bother much about dressing and fussing. We're going, you know, to vegetate, and to love——"

A frightened look came into her face; he felt her hands grow cold even while he held them. His own nervousness increased, seemed to tower spirally, to threaten to engulf him, and this time it was due to his fear that her scruples would reawaken, would perhaps begin troubling her after she had gone away with him, after it was too late!

She withdrew her hands from his, and this tended to heighten his impression. To his surprise she placed her hands upon his shoulder, and laid her cheek upon her hand. The action, insignificant in itself, conveyed an ineffable tenderness, and all his fears fell away from him as he realized how complete was her surrender.

He gazed adoringly upon the sweet, softly flushed face. His arm encircled her waist, pressed her a little insistently perhaps. She removed her left hand from his shoulder, and shifted it under his hand, forcing his fingers to relax their tension. Her eyes were closed, and as he watched her face, he saw a sunny smile dawning about her mouth.

"What are you smiling about, Alice?"

"I am wondering how much more time you are going to waste before you kiss me?"

He laughed joyously. He had fought and struggled for her as he had never fought for any woman before, and now that he had won her, he did not even embrace

her. He kissed her upon the mouth. Her lips parted. She uttered a little cry. But his mouth did not release hers.

CHAPTER XI

It was quarter of five in the afternoon when the large touring car majestically rolled along under the stone archway, one of the five entrances to "The Hermitage." At the top of the arch was a dove-cote, and the birds were fluttering about and cooing. Beyond, the entire mountainside was crowned with laurel. Great, dome-shaped shrubs, so full of the shell-pink, crown-shaped blossoms that the foliage was visible only along the lower edge, like a dark skirt, made the mountain gloriously radiant. There were dozens and scores and hundreds of these shrubs; in parts they stood so closely crowded together as to form a billowy ridge of pink. Before them undulated a sea of bracken, as beautiful and well-formed as Boston fern; back of them a mountain-ridge, taller than their own, reposed in inscrutable majesty against an indigo blue sky.

"Have you seen anything more wonderful, Ulrich? I am glad you brought me here! Oh, it is so good to be alive, to be here with you! Ulrich, you are not looking at the mountain laurel at all."

"No, I am looking at something far sweeter—at you."

"Don't, dear. Don't spoil the landscape by becoming personal. It is simply wicked not to enjoy such a scene to the uttermost."

"That almost sounds as if enjoying it were a task."

"A pleasant task. Nevertheless a task. For I will make a confession. For me also there exists some one

upon whom I would rather gaze than upon the finest landscape in the world. In spite of this, I intend to do my duty by the landscape."

"Alice, I warn you, I am driving, and the man at the wheel is not supposed to be regaled with intoxicants of any sort. It's dangerous."

"That being so, the man at the gear ought to make a dummy of himself."

The car halted abruptly.

"Kiss me, Alice," he commanded.

"You're insatiable." She pulled his head forward, pinching the lobes of his ears as she did so, and kissed his brow.

"Ulrich, darling, I am so excruciatingly, so distressingly happy."

"Not a bit of regret, dear?"

"What a question for the bridegroom to ask the bride!"

But he did not start the car. He had turned to the side of the road which commanded a view of the valley. Some two thousand feet below them was the village. It was only five o'clock, the sun was still high, blazing down upon them in a torrent of heat, but in the distance, over mountains and in valleys and dales, and in all the depressions upon the tops of the mountains so far away that the valleys looked like mere dimples, and their roads wandering circuitously to the tops were but threads of a barely distinguishable shade of green; over all these distant spaces brooded a thick vapor, a humid mist that shifted from purple to lavender and from lavender to smoke-gray.

Ulrich found at last what his eyes were seeking.

"Do you see that house in the village, Alice, where the light is burning, yonder, near the white church steeple?"

It took her a few minutes to find it. When she had located it, he said:

"A minister lives there. If there is any feeling of distress in your foolish, tender little heart, we'll 'phone him."

The circumstance was wholly unpremeditated, and he knew, as he spoke, that for the first time he had been sincere in offering to marry her.

"I think we've decided all that, Ulrich, dear," she said. "Unlike Crookback Dick, I am in the giving mood to-night. So you must play beneficiary."

Her eyes told him what her lips would not say, that she loved him the better for his thought of her.

The "Hermitage" had been built by a famous artist, who had since died, and it was from his widow that Ulrich had secured a three months' lease. The grounds were exquisitely laid out, and the lawns were as well kept as the grass of a park. The roads were firm and hard, and the dust had been laid with oil. The house was built on a rocky cliff, and immediately below it was an Italian garden, with pool, brick walls, marble seats and statuary. Cedars supplied the place of the customary ilex hedge. Alice did not care for this feature, and she was about to remark that it reminded her of a cemetery, when Ulrich commented that he considered this Italian garden by far the most artistic and true to the Italian spirit of any he had seen in America. She was glad she had not aired her view, which she felt vaguely would have distressed him as provincial, and she determined that when she got back to New York she would read up on art and painting and architecture and "such things," so as to be able to converse with him intelligently, and not merely play the stupid listener, when art topics came up.

There were times when he made her feel very callow and unformed and raw, and she was not quite over the feeling when they reached the house.

The house was built in the English style, spreading and spacious, with the near-to-the-ground effect to which the English architects are so partial. Ulrich had highly praised the architecture when showing her some photographs of the place, and the mullioned windows, the flat roof with its square tower, pleased him particularly. He pointed this out to her now, and also drew her attention to the noble, modified Gothic façade which ran along the southern side of the house, about and under which clustered several high red rose-bushes.

They walked to the steps of the house together, but suddenly Alice drew back. The entire steps were covered with a shimmering, golden stuff that gleamed and reflected the rays of the dying sun like so much beaten gold.

"What is it?" exclaimed Alice. "How beautiful it is! But, oh, Ulrich, it is a pity to step on it."

She turned to him, but instead of answering her question, he regarded her with an inscrutable smile, a smile in which there was something like cruelty.

"What is it, Ulrich?" she asked in a subdued voice. "Gold leaf?"

He shook his head.

"Something far different," he said, "and more difficult to procure. I almost despaired of getting it—them—in time."

"It? Them?"

"Place your foot upon it, and see if you cannot guess what it is."

She obeyed him. The golden stuff crackled like dry leaves under her foot, and as she drew back, she saw

that the pressure of her foot, light as it had been, had marred the beautiful sheen. The impression of her foot left a dull, bald spot.

"Ulrich, it isn't—it can't be——" With a sense of nausea she recognized what it was.

"Two thousand goldfish died so that this effect might be secured," he smiled. "It is a regal cloth of gold that I have spread for my bride to walk upon, is it not?"

"Ulrich, you are cruel, you are terrible!" She shuddered, and as he touched her elbow, as if to assist her up the golden stairs, she shuddered again.

"Sweetheart," he murmured, "love is a strange thing. It is easy enough to be happy when we love if everything about is happy and instinct with life. But a love that is truly great, I should like to say a classic love, desires and requires a more flamboyant background. If we can slaughter and kill for the sake of creating one precious, incomparable and original moment in the history of our love, then indeed can our love stand the ordeal by fire, then indeed is our love real love, love such as informed the gods of old when Pan still made music in woodland and glen."

She regarded him with eyes of horror, but as he spoke the horror was allayed and transformed to fascination.

"You are terrible, Ulrich!" she repeated, and kissed him.

Turning, she ran lightly up the stairs, and having reached the veranda, looked back upon the havoc her small feet had made.

Her footsteps brought the servants. The butler and the housekeeper knew Ulrich, and respectfully they greeted him and Alice. Ulrich, when leasing the place, had represented her to be his cousin.

It took Alice just an hour to bathe, and dress her hair

and don a lingerie robe. One of the maids hooked her gown, and then she went downstairs and sat down on the veranda to wait for Ulrich. He was so long in coming, that Alice became impatient and went for a stroll. She discovered a two-story observatory built upon a high cliff, from where the view was even more magnificent and extended than from the house.

She sat down in the second story of this little rustic house to enjoy the summer solitude and to do some serious thinking. She had found it necessary, of late, to actually cultivate serious and concentrated thought. But her mind wandered and strayed back to her lover.

It is really remarkable, she thought, how a rational human being can sit for hours and hours and do nothing but think of another human being, and keep on thinking of him all the time. She thought of his eyes and of the strange little flashes of light they emitted; she thought of the tortured, sinuous line into which his mouth fashioned itself before kissing her; of his smoothness, and suavity, and languid distinction; and then she thought of the little cruel smile that sometimes came to the corners of his mouth. What did it mean? Would he be cruel to her some day? How and when was this mad love of theirs destined to end? Would he be the first to desire a separation? Would she?

She had thought of all this before more than once, and she did not wish to think of it now, and she began to wish she had not come away from the house alone. A feeling of loneliness came over her. At that moment she saw him, walking away from the observatory in which she was sitting, in the direction of the house. Quickly she called:

"Ulrich, Ulrich, here I am—wait for me!"

She ran down the spiral stairway as fast as she could

in her high-heeled, low shoes and the long, clinging gown. He stood waiting for her at the bottom of the stairs.

"Didn't you see me?" she asked reproachfully.

"Yes, I saw you."

"And you deliberately walked away from me?"

He sat down on a rustic bench and took both her hands in his. She was standing before him.

"I thought, sweetheart, that perhaps you wanted to be alone a little while; you have had a big dose of me all day."

"If you think that, I, too, must have been too much for you."

He pulled down her head and whispered in her ear. She drew back, her face flushing:

"You are horrid, Ulrich!"

Her lips were smiling, and she averted her eyes.

Making room for her, he said:

"Come and sit down beside me, Alice.

Dubiously she regarded the rustic bench.

"I do not trust that bench, Ulrich," she said disapprovingly. "I think your knee will be far safer for my gown."

He drew her upon his knee, and immediately she began brushing his eyebrows with her fingers.

"What's the matter with my eyebrows?" he demanded.

"Nothing. They are perfect."

"Alice, do you know, dear, the only time you do not wholly please me is when you pay me compliments."

"I am sorry, Ulrich. I pay you a compliment now and then merely to indemnify myself for the disagreeable fact that you are entirely too fine looking for a man. You yourself taught me a man should be brainy rather than handsome."

"Haven't I enough brains to suit you?" he asked, a trifle piqued.

"Oh, so, so. But if you weren't so aggressively handsome—don't frown, Ulrich, you know you are quite the most beautiful masculine creature that ever lived—you might have still more brains and instead of being merely a well-known physician you might be a colossus, a second, a second—why don't you help me find the correct comparison, Ulrich?"

"Help you to properly defame me? Indeed not," but he laughed at her audacity. "Give me time, my dear, I am only twenty-nine. Perhaps I may some day be a truly great man."

"Perhaps." She kissed him. "We'll hope for the best. Meanwhile, Ulrich darling," her tone became coaxing, "I am sure you cannot answer offhand a simple question I am going to ask. In what part of the body is the skin strongest?"

He began in a professional tone:

"You know as well as I do that the epidermis——"

She interrupted him with a spurt of rippling laughter.

"You dear, sweet, silly thing," she said. "I told you you couldn't answer me offhand. Shall I tell you? The skin of the lips is strongest. If it weren't, our lips would be entirely worn away from all the kissing we have done to-day."

"You mischievous little baggage——"

She kissed him.

"Now I have cleansed your lips from the blot left there by those naughty names you called me."

"You mischievous little baggage," he repeated wantonly, "now cleanse them again."

"No, Ulrich, no. I am not a professional window-cleaner."

Divided between laughter and desire, he crushed her to him.

"My sweetheart," he murmured, "you are utterly, utterly delicious!"

"It really seems so." She gave him a look of tantalizing demureness. "I seem to have reduced your usually rich diction to meagreness. You repeated the same adjective twice."

He smothered her in kisses.

"You perceive," he said finally, "my diction can be diminished even beyond the repetition-of-the-same-adjective point."

"I have already suspected as much," she said gravely.

They burst out laughing and fell into each other's arms. Madly he began kissing her throat. His kisses were no longer caresses; they were an assault, an attack.

"That is the way I should like to die," she murmured.

"What are you saying?" he asked sharply.

"Ulrich darling, when you no longer love me then do me the kindness of killing me by biting into my throat, by severing the jugular vein. And hold me in your arms, Ulrich, until I die, until I have bled to death."

"What a horrible thing to say, sweetheart!"

But the suggestion whipped his blood into flame, flagellated his senses. Madness seemed to surge to his brain, fire through his veins. His breath became labored and thick.

She lay in his arms limp, inert, silent, like a victim awaiting the stroke of the executioner's knife. He felt an almost uncontrollable desire to plunge his teeth into the soft, white column of throat. She wore a low-necked gown, and his lips sought her neck.

Struggling to get away, she exclaimed:

"Ulrich, you are behaving horribly. I believe you tore

my gown. Heavens, how you have mussed it!" Looking at him reproachfully, she added, "I made a mistake. The bench would have been safer."

She sat down on a bench opposite to him, and deliberately turned her back to the west.

"What a beautiful sunset we are having!" she said, looking at him.

"And you are getting such a charming view of it," he mocked.

"We are really behaving shockingly," she said in a low, modest voice. Both laughed. He pulled out his watch.

"Seven o'clock," he said; "supper is waiting. Come, sweetheart. I am hungry."

They walked silently to the house, arm in arm. The sun was back of them. They were walking away from the light, and this seemed to symbolize to her her past and her future. She became contemplative, sad, melancholy. Her merriness, her mischievousness was gone. She had come to the crossing of the ways and she had chosen. After to-night there was no power in the world that could give her back what she was about to surrender.

CHAPTER XII

He had finally prevailed upon her to retire. They were together in the sitting-room. At the other end of the hall was his bedroom. Adjoining the sitting-room was her dressing-room and her bedroom, the room which they were to share.

"Ulrich, is there no maid about—?"

"They have all gone to bed. You told me expressly you needed no maid." He paused, looking at her mischievously. "Can I help you?"

"Oh, I suppose I can manage alone."

"You know very well you cannot without ruining that lovely gown. Be sensible, dear, turn around; let me help you."

"No, no!"

"Why not?" he passed his arm around her. "Why not?" he asked in a low, insinuating voice, the voice that never failed to make her tremble, that made her fear him, its softness seemed so suggestive of the feline grace of the panther approaching its prey on velvet paws.

"No, Ulrich dear. No. Please go away, please don't kiss me."

She cowered under his kisses, pressing away from him, resisting, unyielding.

"What is the matter with you? You are trembling."

"Ulrich, I am so frightened!"

The words came with a little gasp. Her face was very white, the hand that touched his cold as death.

"Of course you are frightened. Why won't you let me

kiss you? My kisses would reassure you." He spoke easily, smiling down into her eyes. She essayed to smile in return, and put her cold fingers upon his lips, as if to silence him. He kissed them rapturously.

"Let me help you," he urged once more, coaxingly.

"Well, then, you may. But Ulrich——"

"Yes, yes, fear nothing. My conduct will be eminently proper."

He began to do so very gently, and not as slowly as she had anticipated. Having completed the task, he kissed her on the back, a little below the nape of the neck. It was no more than she had expected, and she made no protest. As she turned about to face him, after he had disengaged her, he deftly caught her waist and slipped it down from the shoulders and from her arms, tangling the lower part of her arms and her hands in the filmy stuff.

"Please, please!" she begged.

He clasped her to his breast.

"Don't be foolish, sweetheart. What is the harm?" Holding her with one arm, he slipped the fleecy shoulder straps of her garments down from her shoulder, over the upper arm and imprinted kiss after kiss upon her bare shoulder.

"Ulrich! Please, dear, don't."

"What, afraid of me? Alice, dearest, how foolish you are! You say you are in love with me—why then pretend it while having upon your shoulder that soulless, heartless, feelingless bit of linen for my appreciative lips?"

She laughed nervously.

"Ulrich, I am sure you want to smoke a cigarette."

"What puts such nonsense into your head? I never felt less like smoking in my life. Do you suppose a man

expecting to banquet on champagne and canvas-back duck first blunts his appetite by eating Irish stew?"

"It is very horrid of you to compare me to canvas-back duck!"

"Very well. The next time I shall compare you to Irish stew."

She laughed, as he had meant she should, but there was a note of hysteria in her laugh, and the two little red spots, the usual danger signals, showed prominently on either cheek.

He released her and helped her into a chair.

"Alice, dear," he said, "you are nervous. That is natural. Do you not think as much depends for me upon the impression I make upon you, as for you upon the impression you make upon me? I love you, I adore you. You know how madly. Think then what I were to suffer if you, at the end of a week were to say to me, 'Ulrich, you are not the sort of man I supposed. You are deficient in delicacy, you have entirely too much temperament, and the violence of your desire frightens and in no way delights me. I have made a mistake and I must bid you adieu.' Do you think that would be pleasant for me? That sort of thing has happened to men, as well as to women."

The removal of his immediate presence had restored her to comparative tranquillity. The light of mischief glimmered in her eye.

"Surely, Ulrich, that has never happened to you?"

"Oh," he answered airily, "I have met with one or two unappreciative women."

The insolence of his conceit brought a smile to her lips. But again, with alarm, he noted that lurking note of hysteria. He began to fear she might spoil this night of nights for him. Yet he could not believe it. He

thought her a woman of too much breeding to lose control of herself in that way. He had perceived with pleasure that she had slipped the waist completely from her figure, instead of slipping it back over her shoulders, as he had half suspected she would. She had done it quite unconsciously, without any show of embarrassment, and he felt the keenest gratification at seeing her so complacent and self-unconscious, for it was one of his dogmas that by such small tokens does the thoroughbred woman establish her claim to good breeding. He had half dreaded that with feigned modesty she would draw the waist back over her shoulders, and he felt that he would have hated her for doing it.

Now she sat there, her back turned to the soft glow of the wood-fire which the chill June evening made pleasing—her face and the exquisite alabaster of her shoulders and bosom illuminated and warmed by the blood-red glow of the flaming pine roots.

How beautiful she was! His lip quivered slightly, as, without appearing to see, he took in every detail of the delicate curves, the firmly modelled flesh. A sudden fear came over him, a fear such as he had never experienced before in the presence of any woman, a fear born of misgivings in his own power to hold the affection he had won. How pure and white and pristine she seemed! What, if in some unintended way, he should offend the innate modesty, which he felt was one of the fundamental traits of her character, was perhaps, its keynote?

He meant to give her as much freedom as she wished. If she seemed to prefer it, he would leave her by herself till to-morrow. On the other hand, she was passionately fond of him, and undue consideration on his part for her modesty might offend her, and make her doubt the strength of his love, if he failed to employ

some of that gentle force which is a lover's privilege; the latter imprudence might thus be the greater of the two.

And again, in the glow of the log-fire, he noted the two little danger signals on either cheek, speaking so eloquently of her inward perturbation.

What was he to do? It was out of the question to subjugate her senses by caressing her, as he would have done with ninety-nine women out of a hundred. Her soul would remain a lucid witness, and would condemn him, and no intoxication of the senses would ever help him to overcome the arraignment of her spirit. Nor was it his former experience with women that warned him against committing this folly of follies. For the women he had known had not been of a class to nurture observation of the finer and more complex feminal traits. It was the inherited instincts of his race, his blood, that sounded the tocsin of caution.

How was he to win her soul to quiescence, as well as her flesh?

She had stretched out one white arm, and in doing so, had touched a huge chest standing near her.

"What is this chest, Ulrich?" she asked. "I noticed it before. The carving is magnificent."

"It is an Italian marriage coffer, a cassone, and I purchased it for you, hoping it would please you."

And in a low-pitched voice he told her how the Italians of the Renaissance when a little daughter was born, immediately began preparing against the festival of festivals in a woman's life by causing one of these cassones to be carved for her, and when the florid, ornate design which that efflorescent period was bound to evolve, was completed, the mother of the little girl who would one day own it, began to fill it with choice linen, rare

laces, costly silks and fabrics, choice pieces of silverware, each a work of inimitable art wrought with elaborate care and with that loving patience which characterized the artists and the artisans of the Renaissance, and to which is largely due the perfection of detail, the minute exquisiteness of each particular which is the hall-mark of this period. Sometimes, if the parents were wealthy, some great artist, Benvenuto, Cellini or Ghiberti, was commissioned to design and to have fashioned under his supervision a set of Apostolic spoons, which consisted of thirteen spoons, twelve of which represented the twelve apostles, the thirteenth being the Saviour spoon. Only two or three of these Apostolic sets remained extant, and only one of these was complete. The plethoric imagination of the Renaissance in no branch of art expressed itself more fully and with more riotous voluptuousness than in the work of the silversmiths. In these spoons, for instance, not only were no two alike, because the figure of the Apostle necessarily differed, but the general design, the surrounding embellishments upon which the Apostle was poised were varied with infinite and extraordinary cunning. A general unity of impression, a harmony of appearance was maintained, which was created by the arrangement of the varying details of each individual spoon, but not by the details themselves, so that it was possible to identify two spoons of the same set at a glance, in spite of the wide divergence in their embellishments. Each Apostle had certain insignia which were peculiarly his own, which, consequently, must be utilized in the design for his spoon; so that just as the Italian painters used a blue robe in garbing the Madonna to denote purity, and a red robe to typify the love of a Mary or a Magdalen, the silversmiths used the design of an eagle or of eagles' feathers to

throw into relief the figure of St. John the Evangelist, the eagle being the Judaic symbol of the Holy Ghost, while the key and the cross denoted Peter, the sword St. Paul, and the girdle of the Virgin, St. Thomas.

Thus the artists of every guild possessed a mystical language of their own, a language at once subtle and poetical, which nevertheless because of the singular religious fervor of the age in which these artists flourished, was as familiar to the people as the signs of the alphabet, nay, more so. And so, for a brief period of the world's history, the pictorial arts—painting, sculpture, the silversmith's craft—were enabled to speak and not merely to portray, a gift bestowed upon music only a generation ago by Wagner, when, through the creation of the *Leitmotif*, he fashioned a symbolic if restricted, language by means of which his music makes not merely a blind appeal to the helpless and gagged emotions, but speaks to the intellect of the initiated as plainly as if the message were couched in words instead of in sound.

Alice never adored her lover more whole-heartedly than when the musical cadences of his voice were employed in some slightly pedantic discursiveness. He saw the effect he had produced, and was satisfied.

Her soul was warming at touch of the sensuous charm he was enmeshing her with, which was so delicately sensuous that she, all aglow with the pictures he was conjuring for her, perceived only the delicacy and not the sensuousness. The peacock wins his mate by spreading out for her the bewildering splendor of his feathery raiment, the thrush performs his wooing by singing his purest, most flutelike song. He, too, would bring this woman into complete subjection by the musical monotone of his voice, by the imagery of his language, by the suggestiveness of his thoughts.

"I wish," she said, "there were one of those spoons left in the cassone. And it was very good of you, Ulrich, to give me this."

"Let us see," said Ulrich, "whether perhaps one spoon is left in the chest."

"Oh, is there anything in it?"

"There is. But I was in doubt whether to ask you to look at the contents to-night or to-morrow."

Troubled vaguely by some subtle intonation of his voice, she turned her face to him.

"Why not to-night?" she asked.

"Let us look at them to-night," he answered evasively.

He arose, and lighting the three candles of a brass candelabra placed it upon the chair on which Alice had been seated. Then taking a key from his pocket, he drew up a chair before the cassone and proceeded to open the huge chest.

"Are you coming, Alice?"

She had slipped into a kimono of white embroidered crêpe de chine, and again he felt a twinge of joy at the *amour propre* which she displayed. Another woman might have knelt at his knee, as she was now doing, glorying in the presentation of her white flesh to his eye, or forgetful of it in the flush of momentary excitement. But with the certain instinct of the artist whose discernment of the exigencies of the moment is unfailing, she had entered into the spirit of exaltation in which he had wrapped himself, helping him to suppress the *fortissimo* of love until the moment of the crashing *finale*, espousing instead the unostentatious *pianissimo*, which, free from violence and discord, plainly allows the finest chords, the most ecstatic harmonies to dominate.

Kneeling close beside his knee, but never touching it, she watched him take out one by one the old Venetian

necklaces heavily studded with turquoises and with enormous pearls, with fantastic protuberant ornaments, as large as peas, and as finely corrugated as a brain-stone; the strange silver vessels for spices in the shape of knights clad in full coat of mail, javelin, breastplate, cabasset and all; the salt receptacles in the form of mythological beasts, griffons and centaurs, and a Medusa's head through the silver curls of which the pepper had once been sprinkled over the strange, rich foods of the guests at a banquet in the Doge's Palace.

A strand of coral beads left her breathless with delight. Allowing them to run through the fingers of one hand, she continued to kneel, now resting her elbow upon Ulrich's knee. Her eyelids were lowered; the mouth, half-open, gleamed the same hue as the pink coral in the uncertain light of the room.

At contact of her elbow with his knee, a sharp spasm of pain swept through Ulrich. Oh, to be able to take her in his arms this moment, without fear of frightening her, of arousing her hostility, her rancor! His self-control ebbed and waned; like an arrow the pain was shooting through him, setting every nerve aquiver.

Setting his teeth, he said in an uncertain voice, a voice rendered husky, thick and unsteady by emotion:

"There is something more below at the bottom of the cassone. You may wish to look at most of it alone, sweetheart. Only this I want to show you, to tell you how it was made."

Stooping, he drew forth a linen robe of gossamer fineness, as delicate and diaphanous almost as bolting cloth, with a design as fine and marvellously intricate as the scroll-work and Arabesques in which the Moorish artists who built the Alhambra loved to perpetuate and make visible the glories of their fluid imagination.



A STRAND OF CORAL BEADS LEFT HER BREATHELESS WITH DELIGHT.

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"It is as fine as cobweb," she exclaimed joyfully. "It is wonderful!"

"Below are other robes, and garments more intimate, and all of them, Alice, were intended for the trousseau of a Turkish princess with a taste for European dress. But the match was broken off, and I was fortunate enough to be able to get the outfit. For you must know that years have gone to the making of it."

With a shock she realized that he had sent for this outfit before she promised herself to him. How sure he had been of her! But she said nothing, while he continued speaking. And in the same musical voice as before, now tremulous with the passion which was agitating him, with the desire which he could barely control, making a superhuman effort to choose words which seemingly innocuous and poetical, would nevertheless induce in her a condition of excitement matching his own, he painted for her a word-picture of a small, ivy-enshrouded convent in France in the valley of the Garonne, where white-robed sisters of a contemplative order spent their hours of recreation in embroidering these fairy-like fabrics. With an aim as deadly as the marksmanship of a sharp-shooter, he described to her the life of these nuns, dwelling in eternal peace, in a land of incessant sunshine, beneath cloudless skies that day after day poured down a golden glory of heat, while the horizon was bounded by the tall convent walls that circumvallated the convent gardens. Their sequestered beauty was ideally calculated to arouse visions of love, and was abnormally conducive to the fostering of that subconscious life of the senses, which, suppressed successfully through years and years, would ultimately rise in aggressive self-assertion, in rebellion at the shackles imposed by the rules of the convent. And these women, doomed to celibacy, who had

forfeited the privilege of ever expecting marriage, whose entire passion of love must be employed in the unwholesome contemplation of the beauties and splendors of their celestial Bridegroom, spent sometimes a year of their lives, sometimes two or three or four, in completing the embroidery of one single garment destined to be worn by a bride on her wedding night, to adorn her on the marriage couch, a mute witness of the intoxication and the terror of first love.

And of all this, these white-robed nuns, in their solitary, sequestered convent walks, in the still hours of inward revelation which come to all flesh and blood, must have some premonition, some lurid perception. What, then, were the emotions aroused in them by such visions?

Alice had withdrawn her elbows from his knees, and her eyes closed, her hands folded under her chin as if in prayer, she knelt as an alabaster statue. But as he ceased speaking, she opened her eyes, and as she lifted her face he saw she made no effort to disguise the emotion which was flooding her. She was aglow with passion.

A song of exultation leaped to his brain—raced through his blood. He had won. She would be his wholly his, entirely subjugated, completely subdued. Without further ado he took her in his arms. But he did not kiss her. He was as unable, at the moment, to use his lips for kisses as for words. His heart was beating like a hammer.

"Ulrich, how your heart is beating! I can feel it."

"It is you who are making it beat so terribly," he murmured.

She drew away from him, and again he saw a frightened look come into her eyes. Was it possible that even now she felt alarm rather than love?

"Alice," he said, "I want to tell you a parable. There was a rosebud which promised to become a flower of rare and peerless beauty. All the other buds on the same shrub had been cut away to give the entire strength of roots and leaves to this one bud. The sun became enamored of this rosebud, and day after day lavished his carefully tempered rays upon her, in the hopes of enjoying her perfume and her beauty when finally the rosebud would consent to unfold her petals as a token of her maturity. When the sun sent the rain to earth, it enjoined it not to beat upon the rose too tempestuously, but to lave her gently, lest the rosebud be frightened at the fierceness of the sun's wooing. Finally the bud signified her willingness to unfold herself in the full majesty of her beauty to the sun. But having given her promise, she suddenly decided that she desired a little more rain to fall. Obediently the sun caused it to rain. Then the rosebud thought she needed a few more hours of sunshine to warm her after the cold rainfall, and the sun shone his prettiest. By that time it was late in the day, and would you believe it, that minx of a rosebud then claimed another night's repose as a bud after the exacting experiences of sunshine and rain. The sun was complacent, but the next morning that abominable little rosebud led him through the same genuflections once more."

As Ulrich finished, Alice, sitting on the floor, at his knee, threw back her head, and to his amazement and discomfiture, burst into a peal of unfeigned and entirely unhysterical merriment.

Composing herself, she knelt, and lifting his chin, she brushed away the frown that had gathered on his brows with her fingers. Then she said, in the half-roguish, half-affectionate way he had learned to love so dearly:

"Ulrich, dear, the sun showed a good deal of delicacy and—stupidity. I am sure if he had discreetly retired behind a cloud, the rosebud would have contemplated him unrobing, unfurling, quite sensibly, like any other well-bred, decorum-loving rose."

He kissed her rapturously. Then he arose.

"The sun withdraws," he said. "When may he reappear from behind the cloud?"

"In ten minutes."

She began undressing hastily, but now that she was alone she became very nervous, and the reflections which had come to her at sunset as she walked away from the sun, swarmed back upon her. Try as she would, she could not escape the upbraidings of conscience. What terrible sin was she committing? Had she lost all modesty? It seemed a shameful thing that, loving him, she would feel this way. Then it occurred to her that probably every woman, married or unmarried, felt much as she did, and this afforded her considerable consolation. She forced herself to think of other matters, and as she slipped into the nightrobe for which she had paid a riotous price, she remembered poor Marie Antoinette and her horror at having to change her chemise in the presence of several ladies-in-waiting. She wished Ulrich would return. She would forget all these horrible and uncomfortable things as soon as he kissed her. Certainly he had been exquisitely kind and delicate. She would never do to spoil his pleasure by allowing him to see how piteously nervous she was. She suddenly became aware that he had entered the room and had closed the door. He did not approach, but waited behind a japanned screen that stood near the door.

"May I come, Alice?" he asked.

"Yes, Ulrich."

She met him half way, and flung herself into his arms. "Kiss me," she commanded.

She meant to be brave, but she could not control the trembling of her body. And her hands were cold as death. She was grateful to him for not appearing to notice her nervousness.

He picked her up in his arms and carried her into the adjoining room. It was sweet to feel him so strong and agile, sweet, too, to feel his warm arms about her cold body and his breath upon her cheek.

He set her down upon a small, furry bed-rug. Its soft lushness was almost disagreeable. Subconsciously she withdrew first one foot and then the other, but he stood so close before her that she could not step aside.

"I do not like this rug," she said. "What is it made of?"

He laughed.

"Canary-bird feathers."

"Ulrich, you are terrible, terrible!"

With a gesture like a frightened child that wants to be taken up by sheltering arms, she put out her arms to him. The world seemed to recede. She was conscious only of his presence and of the terrible beating of the blood in her veins.

"Ulrich, Ulrich," she whispered, "I love you, I adore you, I worship you!"

CHAPTER XIII

"How many women have you loved, Ulrich?"

"Surely, you do not expect my memory to be as infallible as all that," he smiled.

"That is witty, but hardly kind—to the women."

"A little kindness leavened by wit is more agreeable than a lot of kindness unseasoned by the Tabasco sauce of repartee."

"I have noticed, Ulrich, dear, that you frequently employ metaphors based upon table dainties. Do all *gourmands* do that?"

"Dear, dear, *gourmands*—men who overeat—would be more likely to refer to homely fare, leaving it to the *gourmets*—folks who love the tidbits of the best *chefs*—to concern themselves with the dainties."

"Thank you for the correction, dear. Nevertheless, it is a disgusting habit to have, to compare everything under the sun to eatables."

"Not everything, Alice. Not everything. I have not yet compared Strauss's 'Salome' to the sausage called Belloni, although the temptation to do so has been great, since you invariably pronounce 'Salome' as if it rhymed with the other. It is a provoking habit of yours!"

"A month together, and we have each discovered that the other has an unpleasant habit!"

They regarded each other with mock gravity, and then fell into each other's arms, laughing rapturously.

He was the first to withdraw from her embrace.

"What is that perfume you are using to-day?" he asked.

"Lily of the Valley. Imported. Don't you like it?"

"It's odious."

"I will never use it again."

"Please don't."

They remained silent for a few moments, she somewhat amused at the disgust he had so frankly expressed and which had been caused by a drop of a very delicious expensive perfume.

But he was thinking.

For days he had been endeavoring to communicate to her an important piece of news. So far his courage had failed him. He could, however, defer it no longer.

"Alice, the King, my grandfather, is very ill. I have had three cablegrams, as you know, in as many days. I may have to return home——"

"When?"

"Next week."

"To-day is Friday. What day next week?"

"I am afraid——"

"Out with it, Ulrich."

"Well, I ought to sail on Monday. The yacht is being provisioned, and will be ready by Sunday night. Will you come with me?"

His tone was tense with fear of a refusal.

She sighed as she said:

"It is the first week of August. The Medical School does not reopen until October. I can be back by then. Yes, I can come." Teasingly, she added: "If you are sure you really want me."

"If——" He looked at her steadily. "Alice," he said bluntly, "I had hoped you would consent to remain abroad with me."

"Remain abroad?" she exclaimed. She had forced herself to ignore the future, and his question therefore held neither the unexpected nor the expected. Now he made her pause.

"How about my medical studies, Ulrich? I cannot just be your—your——"

"Sweetheart," he prompted.

"And nothing else."

"Why not?"

"That would be odious. That would be debasing myself. I do not think, Ulrich, I can do that."

Suddenly an idea came to her.

"Ulrich, if I were to take up German seriously—I know a little now—couldn't I continue my studies abroad? In that case——"

He said decisively:

"I would never consent to your taking a medical course abroad. You value your reputation, I believe. Very well. If you will consent to come with me, I will do what I can to protect your name, but it would be quite impossible to do so if you were to take a medical course abroad and form a large circle of acquaintances. The position would be intolerable for you, believe me."

She looked at him askance. She did not quite relish the masterful tone he had assumed, but she was just enough pleased to admit that if his attitude was unlover-like for the first time, his manner was precisely the manner which a domineering, but well-meaning, husband would employ.

"But Ulrich, if we arranged matters the way I want, we would be able to see so much more of each other than if I remain here and you return home."

"If you remain here, I shall, on some pretext or other,

manage to take a sail over every three or four months. I suppose we can then manage to keep up appearances. You can continue your medical studies, but you will have to cut out hospital work and take a small apartment, and not be on visiting terms with too many folks. Then when I come, we can practically be together all of the time."

She flushed painfully.

"That would be the best plan," she said in a constrained voice, "but I do not know if I can carry it out. I shall have to do a little figuring. I am not rich, Ulrich, dear, and I do not wish to use up all my little capital, which I should have to do if I give up the hospital work. You see, in return for my services in the morning, Doctor Etheridge has arranged for my board."

He regarded her amusedly.

"You do not suppose that I intend to allow you to pay for your apartment, do you?" he asked. "I, of course, expect to defray all the expenses of your housekeeping. As we'll have to discuss that topic some time or other, we might as well get through with it now. Why worry about money matters? I know you do, dear. Don't you suppose I know what a woman's wardrobe costs? And yours is quite impeccably lovely. This simple, smart little morning frock you are wearing cost you a pretty penny. Shall I guess what it cost you?"

"Well?"

"Sixty dollars at least."

"Fifty-nine ninety." She laughed. "It was horribly extravagant of me to get it, but I knew it would please you. It is so Frenchy-looking. It does please you, doesn't it?"

"It pleases me and it grieves me. It grieves me when I think you spent your precious savings on all these

pretty feathers, because I know you got them on my account and not because of yourself."

"What if I did, Ulrich, dear? I never dressed very extravagantly before, and then for the last three years I have practically lived in uniform. But after I had promised myself to you—I did so want to look *au fait*—is that the right way to pronounce it?"

Ulrich was delighted. It was one of his favorite expressions which she had adopted into her own vocabulary.

"Alice, you are not very rich, as you say, and therefore, dear, you are going to allow me to pay your rent, your butcher and grocer bills, your dressmaker and department store accounts."

"In brief, you wish to keep me! No, Ulrich, a thousand times, no!"

He had expected just this. How different she was from any and every other woman he had known! And how he loved her!

She put her head against his shoulder and said:

"It was very sweet of you, nevertheless, Ulrich, to think of it."

He protested:

"A man usually expects to be the provider."

She started away from his shoulder. There was almost a wail in her voice as she exclaimed bitterly:

"Provider—for his *wife*—yes."

"Alice, sweetheart, how can you be so bitter?"

"I'm not bitter. Only—oh, nothing."

"I didn't imagine you felt that way about it."

"I didn't mean to let you know I did, Ulrich. I'm sorry."

"But inasmuch as we consider ourselves man and wife, why take this stand?"

"Even if we consider ourselves man and wife, we're not man and wife. I wish you would ignore the subject, Ulrich. I've tried to be brave, and I've kept the pain away out of sight, but it hurts me dreadfully when I think of it. And I will not accept one penny from you. I cannot make a paid woman of myself, even for you."

"I thought you were happy."

"I am happy," she replied vigorously. Coming to sit on his knee, she added: "Truly and really, I am, Ulrich. I was silly just now, I dare say. Don't crinkle your forehead like that. Come, I'll massage the wrinkles away, or shall I kiss them away?"

She put her lips against his forehead softly.

"Alice," he said coldly, "at this moment your show of affection is insincere. It is unworthy of you."

Her arm dropped limply to her side.

"Alice, won't you stay abroad with me?"

"If you will allow me to go on with my medical studies as soon as I have sufficient German—yes."

"Decidedly not."

"You might safely make the promise. It will take me at least two years to study German. Two years," she added meditatively, "is a long time."

"What do you mean?" he asked with sudden fierceness. "Do you mean to insinuate that you think you'll be tired of me before the two years are up?"

"Ulrich, what an expression! Tired of you!"

"If you didn't mean that, just what did you mean? I insist on knowing."

His eyes blazed so with anger that she was frightened. She was surprised at this outburst. His rage was out of all proportion to the cause.

"I meant nothing at all," she stammered apologetically.

"I used the words stupidly. One uses them so often."

"Perhaps you meant that I would tire of you? Well, I won't."

"Ulrich!"

"I would never have believed it possible that I should be quite so crazy about a woman as I am about you. I've seen you every day for a month, and I'm more wildly in love with you than ever."

There was something almost ludicrous in the semi-defiance with which he hurled these words at her. But it did not occur to her to laugh. She sat numb and still. His anger was terrible, but there was some of the sublimity of the thunderstorm about it. The reserve strength, the colossal momentum of force which she had always suspected existed underneath his easy and smooth exterior, was in evidence at last.

"I believe I love you more than you love me," he shot forth again. Quick as lightning she replied:

"But the sacrifice is mine."

"Yes, and I wish it were not, if you are going to throw it up to me. I wouldn't have thrown it up to you, if I had made the sacrifice!"

"You threw it up to me the evening we came to an agreement—you let me understand just what a sacrifice it would be."

"I would never have mentioned it again afterward."

"Ulrich, don't be so angry. Come, let me kiss you. Then you will feel better."

She put her arm about his, and pursed her lips. He pushed her away almost roughly.

"I don't want to be kissed." The sudden transition from his kingly manner to that of a sulky child was so comical that it took all of the girl's self-possession to suppress a smile.

"I don't like that expression," he said sternly. "A"

'paid woman!' If you had any notion of how a man treats such a woman, you would never have been so crude as to use the word."

Her cheeks crimsoned. She lived in constant horror of appearing raw or callow to him, with his old-world, sophisticated, polished way of regarding things. And now he had called her crude!

"Have I ever treated you with discourtesy? Answer me!" he thundered.

"Mercy, Ulrich, no!"

"Have I shown lack of delicacy at any time, forced myself on you if I perceived any sign of disinclination on your part?"

"No, Ulrich, no."

Her anger died away suddenly, as she realized that in questioning her he was trying to vindicate himself to himself.

He was standing still and mute now, peering with unseeing eyes across to the opposite mountain range. They were sitting in a maple grove, and she, during his outburst of anger, had seated herself on the grass. Now on her knees, she slid across the grass to him. But he would not notice her. Softly she laid a kiss on his cheek.

"My beautiful panther," she murmured. "My tempest, my thunderstorm, don't be so angry with your little Puritan."

"My little Puritan!"

Like a hurricane he suddenly swept over her, enveloping her, crushing her in his arms.

"Ulrich, Ulrich, you are killing me!"

He released her.

"I have something to say to you," he murmured. "You had better make up your mind to remain with me."

In a quiet voice he told her how cruelly he had suf-

ferred the evening he brought her home with him while Sylvia lay ill, how he had given battle royal to temptation that night.

"I will not consent to suffer like that again. You understand what I mean. If you will not remain with me——" he shrugged his shoulders.

She became frigid.

"Do I construe that as an intimation that you desire to break with me unless I yield to your wishes?"

"I cannot break with you any more than you can break with me. You're my fate, I'm yours."

Busily she picked blades of grass.

"Alice," he said passionately, "don't spoil things. Stay with me."

"You have certainly been frank with me," she said in a cold, distant voice.

"You cannot possibly resent my candor."

"No, I do not resent it. I suppose it is the inevitable man-nature. I suppose a woman can never wholly understand a man, just as a man can never wholly comprehend a woman. Now that aspect of our separation would never have occurred to me."

"As concerning yourself?"

She flushed angrily.

"If it did not occur to me concerning you, it would hardly have occurred to me concerning myself," she said.

"I beg your pardon. I had not meant it in the way you took it. But it would have occurred to you after we had separated, both as to myself and yourself."

She said:

"Possibly."

Honesty compelled her to admit it.

"You see, sweetheart," he went on, "what I feel for you is love, real love. But love is not love without de-

sire. You are too passionate a woman yourself not to realize what torment repressed passion can inflict on a man. I have much work to do when I get back to Hohen. Shortly, inevitably, I shall be Regent. There are many men and many conditions I shall have to fight. But I am so constituted that I shall make a lamentable failure of things if I have to fight myself in addition to fighting others. So you must forgive my brutality in being so candid. You'll stay with me?"

"Will you allow me to go on with my studies?" she bargained.

"Don't tease me, Alice. It is impossible. Will you stay with me?"

"Well, yes, I will, on one condition. You won't force me to accept money from you, will you?"

After a moment's reflection, he said:

"No."

"Then I'll remain with you," she replied.

He became gentle, suave, caressing.

"I knew you would be reasonable, sweetheart." Fondling her hand, he added: "Now you may kiss your panther, your tempest, your cyclone——"

"Thank you, I don't want to."

She sprang to her feet lightly, and without looking back, she ran away. He called after her to wait, but she neither stopped nor turned. She was running down the road with amazing speed. He jumped to his feet, kicked furiously aside the blanket on which she had been sitting, for it had almost tripped him, and gave chase.

"What in all the world is the matter with you, Alice?" he asked, having caught up with her. "Do stop a moment."

"I want to be alone," she said tearfully.

She was fumbling for a handkerchief, but could not find it. He drew out his.

"I have a handkerchief and a shoulder to offer you," he said. "Will you have either, or both?"

Without smiling at his sally, she took his handkerchief and dried her eyes.

"It was better to tell you the truth, wasn't it?" he asked.

"I suppose so. Please don't let us discuss it. You can't imagine how it makes a woman feel. I care for you in so many different ways—I admire your intellect, I take joy in your work, I rejoice when I see you referred to and cited as an authority in medical journals. But your feeling for me seems to be one thing, and one thing only. Oh—it hurts!"

"Alice!"

He was genuinely speechless.

"And now, Ulrich," she went on, "if you only as much as care to pretend that you care for me a tiny, wee little bit in a decent sort of way, you will drop the subject. I am going with you. I will remain with you. You are getting your way, as usual. Now please, be cheerful, and let us discuss—the weather."

She linked her arm in his, and smiled bravely at him.

"Take your big, clumsy handkerchief," she said.

He took it, and, arm in arm, they walked down the road. Suddenly she said coaxingly:

"Panther, now you may kiss your little Puritan."

CHAPTER XIV

They sailed via the Mediterranean, and as he had word on making port that King Egon had rallied, they spent a week in Italy. It was an ideal week, and opened undreamed of vistas to Alice. Much as she knew of literature, a knowledge which ever amazed and delighted him anew, she knew barely anything of art. But her horror of appearing unpolished or raw in his eyes made her assume, when sight-seeing, what might very well have passed as an ecstatic silence. But she determined, once she was ensconced in her new home, to study many things beside German.

She was delighted with Venice, but she loved Florence best—Florence, the city of Dante, of Giotto, of Lucca and Andrea della Robbia, of the Campanile, sweet wraith-like tower of loveliness. And unformed as her taste was, and as he, with his keen insight into her character knew it to be, he was surprised at the soundness of judgment which she frequently displayed in appraising a work of art, which, indeed, she ventured to do only when her enthusiasm carried her away.

She was anxious to see Paris and Vienna, but he would take her to neither city. He was so well known in both capitals that it would be impossible for him to avoid recognition, and to be seen in his company for three or four days would ruin her reputation. She could not help wondering whether there was not some more potent reason for his desire to avoid the two gayest, wickedest capitals in Europe. Some woman?

They separated in Switzerland, he proceeding alone to Hohenhof-Hohe. Alice followed the next day. Sylvia met her at the station. At Ulrich's request, Alice had written the Princess from New York that, after all, she would pay a visit to Hohen. Whether the Princess suspected the true state of affairs or not was still an unsolved problem.

Sylvia had had some one procure the addresses of a number of reasonable priced lodgings, and in the afternoon Alice went by herself to find a suitable apartment. She finally rented two rooms in a short, obscure little street called Prinz Ulrich Strasse, which seemed a happy omen. She had been told at several of the other houses at which she called that no "gentleman" visitors were allowed, and so she inquired, before definitely engaging the two large rooms in the Prinz Ulrich Strasse, which were light and airy but somewhat expensive, whether she might have a gentleman call. The *Portier* replied with a grin:

"Aber natuerlich. What else are you paying twenty marks for a twelve-mark room for?"

Decidedly that left a bad taste in the mouth, and Alice was almost tempted to cancel the bargain. But the house was so clean and neat and aristocratic looking, and the rooms so light and airy, because of a narrow strip of garden adjoining the house, that she swallowed her mortification and paid her deposit.

She asked Ulrich whether the street was named for him, and he said yes. It had been broken through some ten years ago when he had practically been heir-apparent because Prince Joachim, the then heir-apparent, had been a consumptive and childless. Egon had been born the next year, and he had lapsed into relative insignificance until the precarious condition of the old King's health

made it evident that it was merely a question of time before he, Ulrich, would be Regent. Alice could not help wishing that Prince Joachim had enjoyed the best of health and had raised a baker's dozen of children. She began dimly to realize the political importance of a small child's life.

Ulrich seemed pleased that she had taken rooms in the Prinz Ulrich Strasse. It was a quiet, *vornehme* street, not in the least *spiessbuergerlich*, and no one would be prying into their business. But was she not paying very much? Not that he wished to violate the promise he made her at the Hermitage, but if she ultimately would decide to allow him to pay her expenses, she would make him the happiest of men. Meanwhile he did insist on one thing. As she was going to pay the rent, and as he was to at least partially occupy the rooms, he claimed it as his privilege to be allowed to furnish them. She had not the heart to refuse, the more so as it was out of the question for her to spend the money required for handsome rugs and furniture, and she felt that she had no right to deprive him of the luxurious surroundings to which he was accustomed.

She was honest in telling herself that as far as she was concerned, a painted floor would have done as well as the finest Axminster rug; a few cane chairs would have been as acceptable as the finest damask-covered furniture, and a cot would have yielded slumber as refreshing as the most ornately carved four-poster. But to imagine Ulrich's sleeping in a cot under an ordinary, calico-quilted comfort! The idea was preposterous. She dared not expect it of him. He must have comforts quilted in silk, and sheets with hand-embroidered hems at least four inches deep.

It was decided that she was to spend the two or three

days required to furnish the rooms with Sylvia at the *Koenigliches Palais*. Ulrich's mansion was two blocks away, and was known as the *Neues Palais*. Little Prince Eitel Egon lived with him instead of with his grandfather, because the old King was so very ill, and Ulrich believed in rigid discipline for the boy. When Eitel Egon attained his tenth year, the *Neues Palais* would become his establishment, as it was the custom for the *Erbprinz*, the Hereditary Prince, to receive his own establishment upon his eleventh birthday. Sylvia said that Ulrich had been severely criticized by the press for having Eitel Egon with him at his home, instead of allowing him to remain under the King's roof until his tenth year. He had thereby upset all traditions of the past. But Ulrich, so Sylvia said, persisted in saying the lad was not strong and needed constant medical supervision, and he knew of no one qualified to give the same more conscientiously than himself.

"However," concluded the Princess with a malicious smile, "dear Ulrich does not allow for the weeks and sometimes months during which Eitel Egon is at the *Neues Palais* without any medical supervision whatever, while Ulrich is absent in Vienna or Paris—conducting medical experiments, of course."

Alice said nothing. It was evident that Sylvia did not share Ulrich's affection for little Eitel Egon. She was anxious to see the child. It hurt her somewhat to think Ulrich had spoken so sparingly of the little lad of whom, according to all accounts, he was so fond, and yet it pleased her immensely to learn of this new and unexpected side of his character. But Eitel Egon was ill with croup, and could not leave his bed. Ulrich seemed greatly annoyed, and said the attack could have been warded off by any person possessing a modicum of

brains, and would have been warded off if Frau von Schwellenberg had not been confined to her bed. He looked insinuatingly at Sylvia while he spoke, but his cousin maintained an unmoved and placid countenance. Sweetly she answered:

"Dear Ulrich, I believe all your instructions concerning the child have been followed to the letter."

"Seeing the child was not well, upon your return, you might have cabled me, I think." He spoke in a censorious way which Alice had never before seen him employ.

Sylvia swept her eyes insinuatingly from the girl to Ulrich.

"I hardly think you would have thanked me for setting your duty so plainly before your eyes," she retorted.

"At least you might have given Egon a little personal attention."

"What do you take me for? A nursery maid?" she retorted.

"You know that the nights in September are likely to be cold," he continued, "and on hearing that the boiler in the *Neues Palais* had burst, and that the steam could not be turned on, you might have had Egon brought over here. You could easily have made room for him. For that matter, Frau von Schwellenberg, ill or well, would have let him have her sitting room for a few nights."

Sylvia looked distinctly annoyed. Her charm and sweetness vanished. A cruel, vixenish, spiteful look came into her eyes.

"Dear Ulrich," she snapped, "do you really suppose a person could be found in the entire kingdom possessing the hardihood to disobey any of your instructions, much less any instruction concerning Egon? Everybody knows, my amiable cousin, that you are king in all but

name, and have been for years. Your glove is velvet, dear Ulrich, but your hand most decidedly is iron."

Alice arose and went to the door.

"Don't go, honey," said Sylvia with waspish sweetness. "Ulrich and I, having proper family feeling, indulge in these little quarrels about Egon once a week. Nobody minds us, and everybody listens. It makes such delectable gossip for the Court."

Alice stood at the door. She felt horribly embarrassed, and did not know whether to go or stay. At this moment Fraeulein von Hornung, the lady-in-waiting, came into the room, and Sylvia began an animated conversation with her. Ulrich, gloomy and stormy-looking, passed through the door at which Alice had halted. She stepped out after him. He was waiting for her in the little rose-colored *salon* in which the Princess gave her afternoon teas. She went straight to him.

"I am sorry your little cousin is so ill," she said. "Can I not come and take care of him?"

"You sweet thing!" he said in low, affectionate tones.

"Please let me come, Ulrich. I should love nothing better. It always made me happy to take care of a child."

Her voice quavered ever so lightly.

"No—thank you, my sweet little Puritan," he murmured. "I have a very competent nurse now, and Egon is much better. But Sylvia's heartlessness exasperates me."

"Isn't it assumed rather than real?"

"Not in Egon's case. She dislikes the child intensely. She treated him abominably when he lived here. That's why I have him with me now." Ulrich paused, and after a moment's hesitation, continued: "One evening when Egon was about five years old, a prestidigitator had

been engaged for an evening's entertainment in the big hall downstairs. The entire Court assembled to see the magician's tricks and the servants were permitted to stand in the rear of the hall and look on. Egon's maid and governess asked permission to be present. Sylvia gave it. Grandfather was too ill to have any voice in the matter. Egon, who was still awake, begged to have some one stay with him. Remember he was not yet five, and the day happened to be the anniversary of his mother's death. Then my cousin—I like to think it was just thoughtlessness and not deliberate cruelty—told the child that the man downstairs was a magician and could summon the spirits of the departed, and that he must be a good little boy, or he would be punished. Then these three excellent women, having extinguished the light, left Egon alone and went downstairs. Ten minutes later I came into the hall. I heard a whimpering. Running upstairs, I went to Egon's room, and heard the miserable story. Egon by that time was feverish with terror. I lighted the gas, dressed him, and took him away with me. Since that day he has lived with me. No one had seen me enter that night excepting two lackeys at the door. I threatened to inflict all sorts of punishment on them if they dared tell that they had seen me take Egon away. Can you imagine the pleasant time Sylvia had on finding Egon's bed empty? She was in a frenzy, they say. The entire palace was aroused, excepting grandfather. They searched everywhere. Sylvia herself, in a pale pink ball gown, crawled through a gooseberry bush because some one remembered there was a deep pit back of it. At three in the morning, Sylvia had me called. She was in hysterics by that time. Only then did I tell her that Egon was safe and sound in my home. She would not speak to me for a week."

"I do not wonder. It was a cruel thing to do."

"Cruel of me, or of them?"

"Of you. As to them, it was shocking, ghastly!"

Her face expressed her abhorrence.

"Alice, I have treated you badly in not marrying you. Whenever you feel inclined to blame me, will you remember in partial extenuation of my conduct that if I had married you, I would have been unable to do anything at all for Egon? I would have been forced to stand by idly, after grandfather's death, and heaven only knows what would have happened. Sylvia is wholly unscrupulous where her ambition is concerned."

"I don't understand," said Alice, wholly bewildered.

"If we had married, you and I," said Ulrich, "I should have been out of the race for the succession. Sylvia, being a woman, is barred by the Salic law. Gunther, my grandfather's youngest brother's son, would have been heir-apparent, or, in case of Egon's death, would have inherited the crown—the life of a child is easily snapped."

"Ulrich, what do you mean? That is a horrible accusation!"

"Privation, unkindness, lack of care, have killed many a child."

"But a child that is a king!"

"My sweet little Puritan, how little you know of the world! Add to this the further fact that Sylvia loves our cousin Gunther, and has refused to marry him again and again only because she will not marry any one who is not a sovereign prince or an heir-apparent, and you can make a pretty fair guess as to the chance little Egon would have of reaching manhood if I were out of the way."

"But——"

She began and stopped abruptly. She felt a certain delicacy, a certain reticence in discussing his relatives that amazed and delighted him whenever they were on the topic.

"What, dear?" he asked.

"I thought Sylvia seemed so kind, so straightforward. And you seemed fond of her."

"I am fond of her, in a way. She is a very pretty and a very clever woman, and can make herself extremely useful. We were children together, romped, played, quarrelled, made up and kissed. As to trusting her—the best you can do in that regard, dearest, is to appear to trust her always and never to do so. And as to that old fox who is at her heels continually, our superlative Master of Ceremonies, the *Hofmarschall*, beware of him! You have not yet met him, as these days he is in constant attendance on grandfather, to whom, I admit, he is genuinely devoted. Trust a rattlesnake sooner than him."

Alice contemplated her lover gravely.

"How very odd all this seems," she said. "And why didn't you tell me about Egon before? It would have made things so much easier for me."

"I didn't know you then to be the soul of generosity and honor, my sweet Alice. The average woman would have been keenly jealous of the boy. It would have annoyed her to think that love for another person, though a child, could act as a deterrent from marriage."

The girl bowed her head so that Ulrich could not see her eyes. She would not tell him that she had felt a momentary pang of which he described her as being incapable. Following a sudden impulse, she flung her arms about his neck, and kissed him on the lips.

"My dear girl, be careful," he warned her; "we shall be seen."

But she had already kissed him thrice.

She stood in the deep embrasure of the window and watched him walk down the street. Bitter-sweet mingled in her feelings for him. Sweet it was assuredly to know he had this tenderness in his heart for a little child, and it was indescribably bitter to think that she would not be able to bear him a child. A terrible spasm of almost physical agony passed through her at the thought. The maternal instinct was strong in her, but it had been latent until now. She was overwhelmed with harassing doubt as to her ability to hold his love. In spite of the deep well of tenderness in his nature, which seemed a secure guarantee that he would never cast off a woman who really loved him, she knew very well that the elemental passion—sex-love—was his most salient trait.

It was curious, she thought, that she was unable to conquer the sense of sin and shame that came to her again and again. No wife, surely, had ever loved her husband more deeply and more truly than she loved Ulrich. The joy she took in his embrace was often as far removed from sensual pleasure as is the sky from the earth.

Yet what if his love for her were to become less tempestuous, as in time it undoubtedly would? Or if he were to meet another woman who would arouse in him the same feelings? What then? What would be the result? Would the spiritual ties which bound him to her, or the newly conceived sensual passion for the hypothetical woman, be the stronger?

The King's eyes were troubling him greatly these days and he would see no one. Ulrich sat with him for hours, and the *Hofmarschall* never left his royal master's rooms.

The absence of the latter from the parlors and dining room, Fräulein von Hornung, who had a sharp tongue, as well as a sense of humor, described as a "merciful removal by the will of God."

Alice's five days with Sylvia passed off pleasantly enough. After breakfast, Fräulein von Hornung, the plump, rosy little lady-in-waiting, and Freiherrin von Elbrecht, Sylvia's secretary, accompanied their mistress to the little chintz-draped morning room in Sylvia's suite, where they sewed and embroidered and attended to their correspondence, and strummed on the piano. At half past ten several of the Aides usually put in appearance, and Ulrich looked in at about eleven, unless he was busy at the Clinic, which happened two mornings out of the five.

Of the Aides, Lieutenant von Garde was the most popular with the young women. He was dazzlingly fair, his complexion was as pink and white as a sea-shell's, and his manner was charming. Also he blushed as vividly and frequently as any girl. Alice liked him immensely and said she considered him one of the handsomest men she had ever seen.

"Surely not handsomer than Prince Ulrich," cried little Fräulein von Hornung indignantly. "Now, I dote on Prince Ulrich. *Ich bin hoffnungslos in den Prinzen verliebt.*"

"Is he in love with you, also?" asked Alice a little unsteadily.

"Unfortunately not." The plump little lady-in-waiting laughed gleefully. "But, truthfully, now, Miss Vaughn, which of the two men is the more handsome? It's a perennial subject with us, so you need feel no delicacy in speaking your mind freely."

Alice began gingerly:

"Of course, Prince Ulrich is very handsome, very distinguished and aristocratic-looking—*vornehm*, I believe you folks call it; but *Herr Lieutenant von Garde* is, well—he's—I don't know just how to put it—he looks as if the sun had crusted him all over with impalpable gold."

"Oh, dear, what a disappointment! She's in love with him already!" wailed *Freiherrin von Elbrecht*, while Sylvia looked vastly entertained.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Alice, blushing furiously with annoyance.

A pretty predicament she would be in if her remark were to be repeated to Ulrich. She suspected him of being capable of Othello-like jealousy.

"It certainly shatters our hopes," said *Fräulein von Hornung*. "We had all made up our minds you would dote on Prince Ulrich. You're so fair, you know, and the von Dettess—"

"Always love fair women," Alice put in quickly.

Everybody laughed.

"Excepting one," said *Frau von Schwellenberg* slyly, and *Fräulein von Hornung* said quite composedly, although Sylvia sat right beside her:

"Prince Gunther."

Sylvia ignored all this bantering completely. She smiled amusedly, a little indulgently, perhaps. That was all. Alice was immensely entertained. This free and easy atmosphere was very delightful and she understood that it was very different from the manner in which they all were forced to conduct themselves when the *Hofmarschall* was about.

Von Garde came in unannounced. He was in undress uniform, which became him almost as well as his full dress regalia.

"Good morning, ladies," he cried gaily, bowing pro-

foundly in Sylvia's direction. "I have brought a posy for each of you."

"As an excuse for bringing one to whom?" chirped Freiherrin von Elbrecht.

"Guess," said von Garde.

"We wouldn't be so unkind as to expose your heart," retorted Sylvia.

Von Garde came and sat down on a sofa beside Alice.

"How is Miss Vaughn to-day?" he inquired suavely.

"*Herr Adjutant!*" cried Sylvia in an imperious voice.

The young man was on his feet in less than a second, and saluted in military fashion. He first clicked his heels together, then threw his body forward until it was almost at right angles with his legs, swung it back again, and thrusting out his left arm to its full length, with an angular gesture and a stiffening of the elbow touched his forehead lightly with his right hand.

"*Zu Befehl, Hoheit!*" he said.

Quoth *Hoheit* softly:

"I should like a curl of your hair."

"I am overwhelmed."

He rampaged about for a scissors, and came back with an enormous pair of shears which he gravely handed to Sylvia.

"Good heavens, *Herr Adjutant!* I don't intend fleecing a sheep."

"I beg your pardon," he said, producing a pair of tiny scissors intended for nipping the ends of cigars.

Sylvia gravely clipped a curl.

"It is really very pretty," she said. "Now, *Fräulein von Hornung*, a lock of yours, if you please."

Fräulein von Hornung did not move.

"What mischief are you up to now, Princess?" she demanded.

"Oh, come on," said Sylvia, "don't be a marplot."

Having secured a curl of Fräulein von Hornung's hair, Sylvia very seriously presented them to Ulrich when he entered a few moments later, on a silver card tray, saying:

"Ulrich, you have a good eye for the shades of a woman's hair. Which is Miss Vaughn's, which Fräulein von Hornung's?"

Ulrich regarded the two curls of hair with a negligent air, and poked at them with a small finger:

"Dear Sylvia," he said, "the next time you clip hair from a man's head, I suggest you clip it from the top. Even von Garde's is a bit coarse around the ears."

Then he threw the hair into the fire.

"Prince Ulrich," cried Fräulein von Hornung reproachfully, "what have you done? The other curl was mine."

"I am heart-broken," Ulrich smiled engagingly.

"You look it, certainly." Fräulein von Hornung laughed, and made room for him beside her. He fell to admiring her fancy-work.

"*Herr Adjutant*," said Sylvia to von Garde, "do ring the bell, and find out whether the automobile is ready. Miss Vaughn is anxious to do some sight-seeing this morning. The automobile broke down yesterday, and I do not know whether it can be used, or whether Miss Vaughn will have to go in the touring car."

The automobile, it appeared, was all right, and Sylvia said sweetly:

"My dear, I am sure you will pardon me for not going with you? There are a number of letters I want to get through with this morning with Fräulein von Hornung and Freiherrin von Elbrecht."

"Dear me," said Alice, "it will be rather stupid doing the town alone."

Von Garde sprang to his feet.

"May I offer myself as your escort?" he said. "I have two hours at my disposal this morning before Prince Ulrich requires me. I hope you will not decline."

Alice assured him she was delighted. Inwardly she was raging. What on earth made Sylvia play her a trick like that? She had not seen Ulrich that morning, and she had barely spoken to him the evening before, and now, for politeness' sake, she would have to go touring around Hohen at the side of another man.

She found von Garde's companionship very delightful, however, and she enjoyed her morning thoroughly. It seemed to her that the hours spent at the side of this handsome, dashing young officer, brought her a purer atmosphere than she had lived in for many a day. Once, when he lapsed into silence, she wondered what he would do if he learned of her relations with Ulrich. She was afraid that von Garde was becoming interested in her. A miserable feeling assailed her.

"My life is a tissue of lies," she thought, and she hated herself.

She felt deeply humiliated. She longed to confess to some one. She became frightened. It was madness to think of avowing to anyone that Ulrich was her lover. Also it was absurd to believe that this brilliant and wealthy young man at her side, who had awakened in her this sense of degradation, was in any sense a Joseph. Hating herself for throwing this aspersion on him, she returned home to the *Palais* feeling wretchedly unhappy.

The clouds lifted the next day when she went home to her own rooms. Ulrich met her at the street corner. He wanted to be with her when she entered her small

apartment. When Ulrich unlocked the door and pushed it open, Alice uttered an ejaculation of surprise and delight.

The walls of the sitting room were covered with rose-colored brocaded hangings, the floors were inlaid with parquetry, and the most beautiful Persian rugs Alice had ever seen covered the floor. The gilt furniture was upholstered in old rose and tapestry; ormulu clocks and ornaments stood upon the mantel, and a huge brass candelabra stood upon a console of inlaid satinwood. The furniture of the bedroom, hung in pale blue, was Circassian walnut, and the bedspread was Italian filet over pale blue satin. Plate glass windows replaced the old-fashioned four-panelled windows.

"Oh, Ulrich, how lovely, how charming! How could you do it so quickly? It is like Haroun al Raschid—do you remember, when he had an entire house refurnished, in one night? Thank you so much!"

"Don't I get as much as a kiss for my pains?"

"Oh, yes, of course." She came to him like an obedient child. But as she kissed him she thought of the morning of the day before spent with von Garde.

"May I come to-night?" he asked.

"Yes, Ulrich."

"At eight?"

"Yes, Ulrich."

"I have a lecture at three, and at five I must see von Hermhelm about the financing of an orphan asylum and some new public schools. I will be here at eight. Will we run over to Hohenhof-Lohe, and dine out, or shall we dine here? You can order a supper from a caterer's, you know."

"Just as you wish, dear."

"Alice, I haven't had an uninterrupted kiss for five

days, and you pretend not to know what I would prefer—a formal, conventional tête-a-tête in a public dining room, or an uninterrupted, delightful, intimate little supper here.”

His eyes were afire; the love-light in them thawed her, melted away the aloof, detached manner which she had been forced to cultivate during the past three days, and which unconsciously she had retained. She laughed, and wound her arms about his neck.

“We’ll sup right here.”

“Very well.”

He kissed her quickly, perfunctorily, almost, she thought. At the door he said:

“You’re sure you’re satisfied with the arrangement? you wouldn’t prefer automobiling over to Hohenhof-Lohe and a late supper at some café where there’s good music?”

“No, stupid, no.”

She went to him, and kissed him on the mouth.

“Don’t kiss me again, Alice, I implore you! I have a lecture at three—I must keep my wits about me—don’t, dear, don’t—!”

Laughing, he disengaged himself from her arms and fled through the open door.

CHAPTER XV

All morning the rain had beaten down, flagellating the pavement and flaying the bare earth in the narrow strip of garden upon which Alice's window opened, until it yawned and gaped like the raw edges of a flesh wound.

All morning also she had worked over her German. Fräulein Metzger had severely censured her slovenly declensions the day before, and assailed by an undefinable shame at her inability to concentrate her attention upon matters purely intellectual, an inability that was becoming habitual with her, Alice had determined to discipline herself relentlessly during the entire morning.

At first her attention had strayed continuously, but she had persevered, and when the clock struck twelve, she was both surprised and gratified to find how many exercises she had translated, how many nouns she had declined, how many absurd verbs she had conjugated.

"I deserve a holiday this afternoon," she cried gaily—cried it out aloud for no other reason than to break the silence of her rooms. Then she went to the window and looked out.

Neither rain nor wind had abated one jot; they seemed, if anything, to gain violence as she stood looking out upon the tumult of water swirling about like a whirlpool in the flower-beds.

"How shall I relax after my labors of the morning?" she asked herself, and smiled in mute enjoyment of the conceit. "By thinking of Ulrich, of course," she whis-

pered, and pressed her forehead, hot and burning from the morning's work, against the cold window-pane. She remembered Marie Bashkirtseff's words, and agreed with her that in a solitude where environment and luxury make for happy thoughts, a woman barely desires even the society of the man she loves.

She opened the window and poured out a glass of buttermilk. Her cash capital was rapidly diminishing, and another six weeks would elapse before she could expect her next remittance from her banker at home. Ulrich had expressed his desire that she should appear at the first Court Ball of the season. The gown would cost her, she knew not what, and in her anxiety about her monetary affairs, she had adopted a buttermilk diet, limiting herself to a quart of buttermilk and three unbuttered rolls a day. She was not very fond of buttermilk, and many a day she would have preferred eating and drinking nothing to eating the dry rolls and drinking the acid milk. It was merely for fear that she might lose her color or flesh that she scrupulously partook of the unappetizing liquid at meal times. For if she were to grow pale and thin, and Ulrich, by any chance, were to discover the truth—she shivered. She had seen Ulrich angry once or twice, and it was a spectacle she had no desire to see repeated with herself as the object.

So she drank and ate her meagre rations, and rinsed the glass and washed her hands. Suddenly a great feeling of unrest came upon her. She looked hungrily out into the rain. She would have loved a long, long tramp over a rough country road, such a road as is found in the Adirondacks, or the Shawungunk Ridge, or the Blue Mountains of Pennsylvania. For a few moments she battled with the temptation that beset her to don hat and coat and venture out.

Common-sense triumphed. Improperly nourished for over a month, she knew she was in no condition to battle with the storm that raged without. But the desire for the keen tang of the cold, wet air was upon her, and to effectually dispose of the matter, she took off her dress, and got into a dressing gown.

She hesitated over her various dressing gowns. Ulrich had pronounced the blue Liberty satin edged with white lace and panné velvet delicious, the pink taffeta with flowers appliquéd in pink satin, *chic*, and the white Japanese silk kimono, with butterflies brocaded in white and silver, and wistarias appliquéd in pink and gold, he had termed fairy-like, "almost worthy to cover the shoulders of the most beautiful woman in the world."

Was she really so very beautiful? Had she lost none of her beauty during the fast of the last month? She pulled down the white kimono and got into it. The sleeves were very wide, and the least gesture revealed her soft, well-rounded arms. Ulrich had praised it for this feature. She remembered how he had kissed her inner arm, in the little soft hollow formed by the crooked elbow, the last time she had worn it. Suddenly, barely knowing what she was doing, quite spontaneously, she lifted her arm and kissed it quickly in the same place where his lips had lingered in voluptuous enjoyment.

She seated herself before the mirror and regarded herself critically. The most censorious of judges could have taken no exception to the exquisite bloom upon her cheek, the humid eyes, the coral-tipped lips, the soft swell of the bosom.

Nodding at the image in the glass, she said soothingly:

"You're just as beautiful as ever you were, dear."

Then suddenly a wave of weariness and disgust passed over her. What an existence! Would it always be like this? Would she always tremble the moment she was not in immediate proximity to him, for fear that she might lose her beauty, and by losing that, lose him? Was she not lowering herself, and abasing herself by perpetually entertaining this almost morbid desire to be physically pleasing to the man she loved? How long would he love her? She him? Did she really love him or was she merely in love with him? That was a burning question that had presented itself to her again and again in her hours of solitude, and strange to say, it was of more telling importance to her than whether his sentiments for her were based upon mere physical infatuation or were of the deeper, abiding kind. She felt she would hate very much less to have him desire to break with her than to desire to break with him. And yet she was not certain of this, either. So far she had not been jealous of him. There had been no occasion.

Suddenly she thought of von Garde. She was certain that where he once gave his love, his love would remain. She did not know what particular thing had given her such a high notion of this young officer. But she felt instinctively that he was a man a woman could trust—trust to the uttermost. She almost envied the woman whom he would love and marry. No heart-burnings for her such as she was hourly passing through. Where Ulrich was compelling, commanding, almost insolently dominant, von Garde was ingratiating, winning, engaging. Again she envied the woman whom he would love. Suddenly it occurred to her that she might be that woman. "I hope not, I hope not," she murmured.

The mood passed. She forgot about von Garde. She

now thought of Ulrich only. She sat at the window in her white kimono, but she no longer saw the rain.

It was ridiculous to wear that exquisite white kimono on a rainy afternoon. She had been riotously extravagant when she had bought it. She had paid over three hundred dollars for it, and it had been her bridal kimono; and that association, and also because Ulrich had kissed the little hollow in her arm when she last wore it, made her happy in feeling its touch upon her skin. The memory of that kiss was so poignantly recent. It seemed to her, because of this, that she achieved almost a physical nearness to him. So she sat down in it and began embroidering on a white centrepiece. It would probably last as long as her small bank account—and after that—again she shivered. "*Après moi le déluge,*" she murmured. It was an expression she had picked up from Ulrich, like many others.

Ulrich loved to see her embroider. He said it made him think of beautiful, frail Mary Stuart, who had been so fond of the tapestry frame, because in embroidering, her long, slender, tapering fingers showed to advantage. And then he had minutely examined Alice's fingers, and pronounced them quite perfect. "Very aristocratic, and denoting a keen love of the artistic." And he had kissed each finger separately. And when he had finished kissing them, he had kissed her under the chin. He had spoken of the lovers of Mary Stuart, and how the *insouciant* enchantress, by the movements of those beautiful, waxen, delicate fingers while plying the embroidery, had, perhaps, first tangled the hearts of wicked Darnley, and gallant Chastelard, and unhappy Rizzio. Then he had asked her whether she was fond of embroidering for the same reason—to tangle men's hearts—and she had answered that she desired only to hold the one heart that

had already become entangled with hers, because she feared that untangling them would break the weaker vessel—her own.

Filled with these acute and intimate memories, she stitched on, not heeding how time went. How curious it was that one individual should so completely change the current of another life! Six months ago she had not known of his existence. Now it seemed almost incredible that there should have been a time when he was not an integral part of her daily life, that there had been a time when she had been fancy free, had possessed her own body and her own soul. Now her entire little universe revolved about him. Everything that did not concern him either directly in the past or present seemed dim and unreal. The familiar friends of her childhood and youth—all her early associations—seemed intangible and incredibly remote, like a landscape seen from a rapidly moving train through a curtain of driving snow.

His dominion over her was the more remarkable when she reflected how little of their time, on the whole, they could spend together. During the last week he had been with her only twice, four nights ago and the night before. This morning, after leaving her, he was to motor over to Hohenhof-Lohe. His cousin, the reigning Duke, was very ill, and desired his medical opinion. Ulrich intended returning by train in the afternoon, and as he expected to be extremely busy on some matters the King wished him to attend to for him during the next two days, he would probably not be able to see her for three or four days. Three days hence! Three days without him! Three days with only her German and her embroidery and her thoughts of him!

Perhaps his carriage would pass down her street on leaving the railroad station. The *Grosse Bahnhofstrasse*

was likely to be flooded during a heavy rain. It would be a comfort to merely see his carriage or his car whisking past.

But the quiet of the obscure little street remained unbroken save for the splashing of the rain.

Heavy footsteps suddenly tramped upstairs. There came a rap at the door. She called "*herein*" indeterminedly. Had he disguised his footstep, and had he managed, on his way home, to stop in to see her?

The door opened and a boy in a white cap and apron entered. He was drenched, cap and all. His rough, abnormally red cheeks gave the impression of cheap dye that had run through being prematurely brought in contact with something moist. He was loaded down with a tall case strapped together with heavy leather thongs, used for carrying dishes from restaurants.

"The gentleman is coming right after me," he announced. Ulrich entered. He likewise was dripping wet. He was loaded down with a package evidently containing several bottles of wine. In her astonishment, Alice sat down limply on the couch. Ulrich laid his finger on his lips to warn her from crying out his name.

"I didn't think you would care particularly to go out in this rain for supper," he said, "so I stopped at a caterer's. He would not serve us later, so I had them send the things now."

Here he winked his eye to Alice.

"But, *mein Herr*, how could we?" said the boy earnestly. "We are so very busy. Princess Sylvia is giving an afternoon tea to the Cabinet Ministers and their wives—it is a crazy fashion she has adopted since she was in America—and every one of us will be busy carrying and serving an hour hence, for you must know, *mein*

Herr, we make all the *Gefrorenes* and bake all the *Torten* that are used at Court."

Ulrich was vastly entertained.

"You had better not speak so disrespectfully of any fashion set by a member of the Royal House," he said.

"Oh, as for that, my fine sir," the boy stood and laughed at Ulrich, "if it's a case of *lèse majesté*, I've got you. You grumbled enough at our 'toadying to Court' because we couldn't oblige you an hour later."

When the boy was gone, Alice approached Ulrich with extended arms, ready to fling herself about his neck.

"Look out, dear, look out!" he cautioned. "I am shockingly wet. And I cannot open this top button."

"Let me help you," she said.

"No, no." His fingers worked nervously over the recalcitrant button, while his eyes fairly gloated upon her.

"Do let me help you, Ulrich."

"No, no, you mustn't touch me till I have this coat off. I was never so wet in my life, not even in the bath-tub. Confound that button! I shall tear it off, if I can. And to have to wait for a kiss all this time!"

"You don't have to wait," she responded gaily. "But you are defending yourself against me as if I were the bubonic plague."

"The bubonic plague is not nearly as dangerous as your kisses," he retorted. "Oh, blankety-blank that button! Look out, dear, your lovely kimono!"

He held her off with one arm, the arm that was less wet than the other, and continued to fuss at the button. But it would not come undone. With a quick, graceful gesture, she flung back her arms. The kimono slipped from her shoulders to the floor.

"Change your tailor, Ulrich! That is the way a properly made garment comes off!"

"Alice!"

She was in his arms, his wet face and moustache upon her soft shoulders, upon the white, warm, heaving bosom.

"Alice, I thought, dearest, I would go mad if I couldn't get to see you to-day, couldn't be with you to-night——"

"To-night, Ulrich—you have a Cabinet Meeting at eight to-night."

"Yes, I have, at least I should have had. I have postponed it until to-morrow morning."

"How did you find the Grand-duke at Hohenhof-Lohe?"

"My cousin is dying by inches. I can do nothing but alleviate his suffering. He may last ten years more. Do you know what I did, Alice, about that plaguey Cabinet Meeting? I telegraphed from Hohenhof-Lohe that I had missed my train, and that the meeting must be postponed, therefore, until seven o'clock to-morrow morning. Think of all those worthy Cabinet Ministers, Hermhelm and the rest, who are used to lie abed until eight o'clock, having to be ready for me by the unearthly hour of seven!"

He laughed and chuckled like a school-boy playing truant. Alice had never seen him look so young, so boyish, so irresponsible, almost, and for the first time the quiver of pride and love that he aroused in her held the subtle note of the maternal, which sooner or later comes into the heart of every woman for the man whom she truly loves. She humored him, knowing that she was doing so, and that for once he did not know.

"And you walked here in all this weather?"

"Not a vehicle to be had. Besides, I dreaded recognition. Those cabmen are the very devil for recognizing one. And then I wanted to stop at the caterer's."

She pretended to be horrified.

"You don't mean you actually went into a caterer's shop?"

"My dear," he mimicked her tone of outraged propriety, "I had the hardihood to walk into a caterer's shop, and with this same royal mouth that is now speaking, to order the food that later on is to regale us. And such a banquet, my dear, as I've procured! We will fare as well as at Galetti's. I have champagne, and the ice for it; chicken à la Newburgh—only they do not call it that here, and it's in a sort of thermos dish. The man vowed it would keep hot for three hours. And asparagus tips and baked artichokes, wine jelly, biscuit tortoni and sole with sauce à la Tartar."

"Does the sole à la Tartar follow the biscuit tortoni on your menu?"

"You little minx! I sha'n't tell you the rest. Kiss me, Alice."

"Heavens—is the man mad? What else have I been doing ever since you came in?"

"Look how wet you have made yourself, Alice; you will take a chill."

She disengaged herself and procured a towel, with which she dried her face and arms, for she was as wet as if she had washed. But she did not think of brushing the moisture from her head, and it clung to her fair, pale halo of hair, imparting a lustre to it as of diamonds and opals. Then she slipped back into her kimono, fastening it modestly about neck and waist.

"What a lark this is, Ulrich!" She had entered into his spirit.

"Isn't it?" He was rid of his raincoat at last, and stood examining the further degree of dampness of his clothes.

"You are wet through and through. You had better take off your shoes; and your coat."

"Nonsense, I can't sit in my stocking feet and shirt sleeves."

She went into the bedroom and found his smoking jacket and bedroom slippers, and brought them for him. Instantly he was on his feet, and relieved her of the things.

"My dear," he remonstrated, "I really cannot permit you to wait on me."

She responded demurely:

"I am playing at being a proper, *spiessbuergerliche Ehefrau*, a good, housewifely little bourgeois."

He kissed her hands fervently.

"Go and change your things," she commanded, "or you will fall ill with pneumonia, and will not be able to go home, but will have to stay right here in my rooms. And the scandal I leave to your imagination."

"My dear, I am so happy." Once more he laughed delightedly, and then went into the small hall room adjoining her sleeping apartment which he used as a dressing room. He changed his shoes, washed, combed, and donned the velvet smoking jacket.

But the few minutes that were consumed by his ablutions assumed gigantic proportions in their perfervid imaginations. The acute unrest that always seized them when they were under the same roof, but not in immediate proximity with each other, rushed over them as incoming breakers hurl themselves upon the beach. In that brief moment of separation they seemed to have become aliens to each other, to have been whirled asunder by some cruel fate, and now, as they stood looking at each other, he felt a violent desire to take her in his arms.

Without a word they fell into each other's arms, embracing rapturously, kissing each other madly, blindly, with a sort of undirected wildness, that seemed barren of accomplishment, of meaning, that seemed a mere brutal outlet for the mysterious energy which their mutual presence had engendered.

"What have you been doing all day, Alice?"

"I studied German all the morning."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Poor child! What a dull morning you must have had!"

"My afternoon recompensed me."

"What did you do in the afternoon—read?"

"No, I thought."

"Thought—hm." He turned up his nose disdainfully. "Why not improve yourself by reading?" he queried in a grandfatherly way which he sometimes adopted to tease her.

"How can I improve my mind more than by thinking of you?" she asked demurely.

The color surged to his face.

"You are fond of me, aren't you, dear?" he asked caressingly.

He was still standing, and again something in his manner gave her the impression of youth—as if he were not merely as young as herself but as untouched by life. It was a delicious sensation. She was delighted to have discovered this side of him. Primarily he always awed her. She had never felt quite certain of him. He had seemed so experienced, so sure of himself, so much the man of the world, and his dignity, his self-possession, had always appeared so perfect, so finely polished. Even when he had kissed her in the moments of his most ar-

dent wooing, even in his embrace, she had seemed to herself a green, callow little girl as compared with him and all his little elegances of manner. Often and often she wondered what he, of all men, should have seen in her to love as he did, who knew nothing of the great world to which he had been born, and who, perhaps, if confronted with it, would be a stupid, sodden failure in spite of her beauty, which, of course, she could not help but know was undeniable. At such times a crucifying fear had come over her, and a little voice seemed to tap out the words somewhere at the base of her brain, and communicate them to her ears: "What if he is only amusing himself with you after all?"

In her saner moments it had seemed to her that that, of course, was all, that he was merely amusing himself for a little while, and that she must make the best of that little period while it lasted. But she did not desire to be sane—not on that score—and she discouraged these thoughts from intruding upon her consciousness. But the memory of them lay tucked away in her heart, and now the memory of them suddenly made her happy, for she saw that at heart he was younger than she had supposed, that he was quite boyish. The worldly wise veneer had dropped away from him for once and she had penetrated at last to the real man.

Together they sat down upon the couch. Tenderly he said:

"What is the matter with you, my darling? I have never seen you so mischievous."

He took her hands in his, and clasped them together, folding them in his.

His eyes were dancing. The little flashes of light that they always sent forth the moment he looked at her seemed like a sunbeam afloat in a purling brook. And

she could not have said how the thought came to her out of the unfathomable chaos where all thought is born, but at the moment as she gazed upon this polished, reserved, grave man who had suddenly been transformed into a great, mischievous, lovable boy, it seemed to her that precisely such would be the image, the expression, the charm, the glamour of his son, when he would have one. And together with that thought came the bitter realization that she would never be able to bear him that child, that son. That greater joy would be denied her!

It was a moment of intolerable anguish.

Perhaps only at this moment did she realize how deeply and truly she loved the man. In her terror lest the agony she was living through be mirrored in her face, she would have withdrawn her hands from his clasp and forcibly have held her features in check to restrain them from expressing her distress. But he held her hands firmly, repeating:

"What makes you so mischievous, sweetheart?"

The delicious moment had passed. The sensation of youth, pristine, eternal, disembodied youth, had fled. They no longer trod on snow-capped, sunlit mountains. Once more they were in the valley—once more mere man and woman—lovers. But the valley was pleasant, too, ah, so pleasant! The delicious feeling of having him there, of having drawn him back to her after an absence of only a few hours, surged through her like old wine.

"Ulrich, dearest, I am so happy you have come, that is all."

She was frightened when she found she had again shown him her complete joy in him. To remove the impression, she sat upon his knee. It occurred to her that this did not mend matters, and she edged away from his mouth, as far as she could.

"It's very unwise of me to tell you I am so fond of you."

He was greatly amused by her assumption of a worldly wise little air as she ventilated this view.

"Upon my word, and why?"

"Because she who is a wise and not a foolish virgin, tries always to appear a little aloof, a little unattainable to her lover."

She smiled ever so lightly as she uttered this opinion. There was drollery at the corners of her mouth, a dimple in her cheek, and roguery in her eye.

"She is enchanting," he thought. He restrained himself from kissing her. He was too much of an artist to have destroyed the possibilities of talk to which her remark seemed to point, by an ill-timed manifestation of passion, which might just as well be delayed.

"I am sure, sweetheart, you have acquired that silly notion from some wicked Frenchman."

"I thought you liked the 'silly Frenchman' yourself."

"I do—immensely. But I do not take everything they say as gospel truth. Good old Balzac, honest, hard-working, plodding soul, starving and freezing in his garret, inditing impossible love letters to Madame Hansa besieged by his creditors, cajoling his landlady to get rid of them for him, and finally finding a refuge from them in a shabby, inaccessible rear-house. What did he really know of the great ladies and their lovers whom he described so glowingly?"

"Why, Ulrich, dear, you always pretended to worship Balzac."

"Worship him! I devoured him, just the way you did—you wise little kitten—when I was in my teens. And I am not at all sure that he did not supply part of the impetus for my amatory escapades."

"Go on, dear, go on," she said.

She felt an insatiable curiosity as to his "escapades," of which, as yet, he had told her so little. Modesty and discretion forbade that she question him directly concerning his past, but she hoped that he might inadvertently let slip some recollection or other of those wild Paris days.

She settled herself more comfortably on his knee, and then, remembering that even the most devoted knee may become cramped and uncomfortable if unduly imposed upon, and that he, perhaps, would feel embarrassment in admitting it, she slipped down to the floor, and sat before him in the posture of a Hindu adoring Buddha. As he offered no remonstrance, she concluded that his knee had been cramped, and she wondered whether he appreciated her delicacy in removing herself opportunely. And then her native sense of humor got the better of her. The situation struck her as truly ludicrous. Try as she would, she could not choke back her merriment. Throwing back her shoulders, and resting herself upon the palms of her hands thrown backward, she gave vent to a peal of silvery laughter.

"What is the matter with you to-day?" he demanded. "Your manner is almost Bacchanalian!"

Infected by her merriment, he was laughing without having the remotest idea what she was laughing about.

She bit her lips to regain her gravity. The laughter had flushed her face. It was almost more than flesh and blood could bear to see her thus and not kiss her.

"Never mind, Ulrich, dear, I am in a ridiculous mood to-day. I am so very happy because—no, I will not again commit the imprudence of which I have been guilty half a dozen times to-day, as it is."

"Forget that silly notion of Balzac's, dearest. I know

the passage, but cannot repeat it at random. There is no unwisdom in showing you are fond of me. Balzac was a great artist, and precisely for this reason he was never quite true to nature. He sees events, men, women, their love-affairs through his own particular prism like every other artist, whether painter, poet, novelist or musician, and it is precisely this, the ability to make others see life through the medium of his own vision, that constitutes the artist. But there are certain fictions that must be maintained. When we see an actress portrayed on the stage, we never see an actress as she actually is, as everyone will tell you who has acquaintance with actor-folk, nor do we see exactly the character which the artist had in mind when he created the figure. If the artist is at all practical he has kept his eyes riveted on the requirements of the public, and he has fashioned the character of the actress to be a sort of composite picture of what the public wants to see and expects to see as soon as it sees from the program what the profession of this particular woman is, and of what he actually wanted the character to be.

"You find this trait very strongly developed in Balzac, and it is the cause of his enormous popularity. His men and women are real flesh and blood because they have individual lives and individual thoughts; but Balzac does not give them individual emotions. There are certain stock emotions which are supposed to inform men and women, good and bad, and these stock emotions, or rather the notions of them, vary in different countries. They are sharply defined in France, where everything—manners, morals, wit, art—is imbued with an incisiveness and clearly-lined precision that the manners, morals, wit, art of other nations lack, because graceful emphasis is peculiar to the genius of France.

"Balzac's men and women are individuals only up to a certain point. Once they fall in love, or become ambitious, or fall in debt, they degenerate into mere entities, and behave in the manner prescribed by French stock notions.

"Thus the individual verity is sacrificed to the universal. There are certain emotions which unite men, and there are other emotions which differentiate them. Love all men feel, but the desire for glory through literary attainment only a few men will thoroughly comprehend. By making a direct appeal to the universal emotions, as all true masters do, the artist recognizes that it is not so much his own creature or creation that interests the public, as the emotions themselves, because these emotions correspond more or less closely to the sentiments and emotions that inspire the onlooker. To secure this end, it is necessary to sacrifice certain fine nuances. All lovers must act very much alike. All young girls in love for the first time must act very much the same. The rigid adherence to this idea has made the novels of France at once the most brilliant in form and the most shallow in substance of the novels of the world.

"You must realize that this is true, Alice, now that you have seen a little of life, and lived a little of life. Do you think it would make me happier if you were cold and reticent with me, or gloomy and subtle, when I come to see you, instead of being sweet and charming and natural, as you invariably are?"

"That's all very well, Ulrich. I don't suppose it would make you happier if I were less frank in my avowals, but I think it would make me happier in the end."

She had become grave suddenly, and her gravity robbed her of her girlishness, robbed her of the moon-beam-like, naiad-like quality which usually invested her. The

woman-quality was uppermost and dominant; it was sweet, adorable, delicious, yet withal almost aggressively resonant in her movements, her eyes, her voice. He became frightened. He knew what she meant, yet he could not resist asking:

"What do you mean, Alice? Why should you be happier if you refrained from showing me your love?"

She placed an elbow on his knee, and rested her face in the cup of her hand.

"It will bore you some day, my Ulrich, to hear me tell you the same thing so often, and then——"

"Alice, do you really believe I shall ever cease loving you?"

As he spoke, he remembered his first thoughts in connection with her. He had thought that she would make a pleasant interlude during his stay in New York, before his return to Europe. And simultaneously he recalled what endeavors, what efforts he had been forced to employ in order to win her, and that, indeed, until quite recently, he had regarded the liaison as a temporary one, as enduring three or four or five years, perhaps—still a temporary affair. And with sudden alarm he recognized the gradual change that had come over him in his attitude toward her, and searching his own heart he was both amazed and filled with fear because he saw therein a desire that corresponded to her own, to make sure of her indefinitely. Indefinitely—he fought blindly against a stronger, more salient word. Indefinitely was quite alarming enough.

What had become of his conviction that the desire on the part of a man to perpetuate enduringly his relations with any one woman, even his own wife, was a sign of mental decay? He had always vowed to himself that no one, man or woman, should ever usurp such a proportion

of his own inwardness, as to become necessary to his ego. What if he should never be able to free himself from the shackles he had donned of his own free will?

But his alarm died away as he looked at the dainty, white-clad figure kneeling before him in an adoring attitude. Certainly, there was nothing formidable about her. She was not a soul-destroying vampire, an insatiable harpy, such as a man might justly dread, such a one who, if in danger of being deprived of the man she covets, would be capable of Satanic, ghoulish rites in order to chain him to her. She was a tender, adorable, charming little woman, who, if told that all must end, would make no distasteful scene. In imagination he could see her lips quiver, her eyes become inscrutable with suppressed misery. That would be all. There would be no violent language, no vehemence, nothing disagreeable of any sort. His heart smote him. A great wave of tenderness welled up within him. It were only just to allay her anxiety.

He took her by the shoulders, and folded her to his heart.

"Answer me," he said, "do you really believe I can ever cease loving you?"

"Silly—not just yet. Did you think meant this very minute?"

The moment was tense. Unconsciously she had sought refuge in the tender raillery which, without knowing it, she used so skilfully. He was holding her very close, and the nearness of her lover subdued her voice, modulated it infinitesimally until it trailed into a soft, cooing sound.

"You know, Ulrich dear, you are a very mysterious person to me."

"I'm not at all complex, am I?"

"So very complex, Ulrich. Shall I tell you——"

"Yes, tell me all."

"Sometimes, Ulrich, I think you do not care for me half as much as you pretend to. You seem so self-sufficient. Then again it seems to me that you care a good deal more than you say—than you—say."

She had meant to say the second time "than you know," but the still little voice at the base of her brain sounded a tocsin of warning in her ears: "Beware, do not strip your feminine, idolatrous soul entirely bare for the delectation of his hard, masculine eye. Do not allow him to read you completely—do not tell him how completely you read him."

"Sometimes, Alice, my love," he said, "I am quite sure that this is true."

He smothered her in kisses, and then released her.

She began folding her embroidery.

"Were you embroidering when I came in?"

"Yes."

"Then you fibbed before, when you said you had been thinking of me."

"No, no," she protested, adding solemnly: "Didn't you know that embroidery is merely an excuse for a good, uninterrupted think?"

She held the work out to him to admire.

"It is very pretty."

"Yes, I think so myself. The design is pleasing. Rococo, I think. And look, Ulrich, I have worked the flowers in the four corners in colors, the roses in blue and the forget-me-nots in pink."

"Why did you do that?" he asked in surprise.

Something unusual in her voice attracted him, interested him.

"I thought it would give the cloth a Frenchy look," she

said with submissive, downcast eyes. "When it is finished, we will use it as a breakfast cloth, and we will imagine we are a shepherd and shepherdess—at Versailles."

He was mute with astonishment. What a change had taken place in this girl since she had placed herself in his hands three months ago! Three months ago, if he had made the remark she had now made—in spite of her playfulness and drollery—she would have asked him what he meant. Oh, she was charming, adorable, quite perfect! Earnestly he said:

"Do you know, dear, that you have changed immeasurably?"

"Yes, Ulrich, I know it. It is my love for you that has transformed me. I realize that I am different than I was. I feel different. I feel my love for you clean down to my finger-tips."

He put out his hand to clasp her, but quick as lightning, she threw the cloth over his hands, and clasping her hands over his, the linen between them, she gazed into his eyes, her own still aflame and dancing, her sweet lips pursed for a kiss.

His heart began beating madly. He tried to disengage his hands, partially succeeded with one hand, and reversing conditions, he held down her hand with his, the linen still separating them.

She uttered a sharp cry of pain.

"The needle, Ulrich, the needle!"

He released her at once, but the needle had bruised deep into her delicate flesh.

"I am so sorry I hurt you," he exclaimed.

Again desire swept over him. Uneasily he moved away from her, as though settling himself into a more comfortable position, his one wish being to commit no act

of vandalism by destroying the pretty scene she was enacting for him.

Not in his wildest moments of pleasurable anticipation had he expected to so completely effect her conquest. He knew her to be clever, playful, entertaining, but he had believed that these qualities exhausted the range of her versatility, and he had distinctly expected at times to be a little bored; he had looked forward to feeling a craving for a lighter, more stimulating, less substantial entertainment.

He had believed that as she became inured to his caresses, she would yield herself more fully, more willingly, to his embrace. But he had believed her temperamentally incapable of ever taking the initiative, of wooing him, of offering herself, of playing with him in this exquisitely romantic fashion.

He had never believed it possible, owing to her modesty, which was always to him her most salient trait, which never deserted her even in the moments of most profound intoxication, of supreme physical exaltation, that she would develop her playfulness beyond the coy, demure, Quaker-like raillery which had so charmed him on the first Sunday spent together in the deserted village. He had not believed that the peculiar genius required for this was hers. It filled him with a sense of triumph, of exultation greater than any success his intellectual attainments had ever brought him, to realize that he had brought about this subtle change, that his brain, stimulating hers, had achieved this transformation.

Why could he not abandon himself completely to the delicious mood in which he had found his beloved? How different was her subjugation to that of those women who had gone before! Not a mere fleeting subjugation this, enduring *only* for the brief span of pleasure, but a

abjuration in which her heart, her brain, her entire being participated and acquiesced.

He likened himself to a man who, having heard a symphony by Beethoven, or an overture by Wagner, rendered only through the meagre vehicle of the pianoforte, knowing no other instrument, not guessing even that other instruments exist, is suddenly ravished by hearing the complete orchestral score, the blending of the various voices of the orchestra, the sombre richness of the 'cello, the pathos of the violin, the sweetness of the flute, the faintiveness of the oboe, the joyousness of the trombone.

His desire for her became almost insufferable. He closed his eyes, and a deep sigh, wrenched from his heart, broke from his lips.

He felt her cool fingers upon his eye-lids. He pulled her hands away from his eyes, and kissed the palms passionately. She squirmed, her self-possession gone.

"Don't, Ulrich, don't, be merciful!"

Panting, almost sobbing, she flung herself into his arms. He bent over to kiss her.

CHAPTER XVI

It had been decided between the three of them, Ulrich, Sylvia and Alice, that the latter was to make her formal appearance on the occasion of the first Court Ball. Whatever Sylvia's shortcomings were, she was kindness personified to Alice. She went to Paris with her for the express purpose of helping her select her ball-gown. She took Alice to Paquin's and helped her decide on the gown and even got the price down from fifteen hundred francs to a thousand francs. Even that was a ruinous price, but Alice had been saving and starving, and was able to pay for it in hard cash.

She was greatly worried about her financial condition. She had decided to have her banker send her her entire little fortune. But she put off from day to day writing him. Possibly, also, he would be able to sell the old homestead, but there seemed something sacrilegious to her in disposing of the old place. She could not possibly continue subsisting on her interest. That alone would not suffice to replenish her wardrobe suitably, for that "suitably," which had once been defrayed by three or four hundred dollars a year, would now require at the least ten times that sum.

She forgot her worries when the ball-dress arrived, and when she surveyed herself in the overdress of gold net embroidered in pink silk and silver thread draped over pale blue chiffon over a lining of flesh-colored silk. She was too much of a woman to think of mere money at such a crowning moment. Alice was not vain, but as

she surveyed herself in the long pier glass, she knew that what Ulrich and young von Garde were telling her continually was true. In loveliness she could hold her own with any woman in the world.

Having hung it away carefully, she dressed in the tailor-made which she had bought at Redfern's the day before sailing. Then she remembered that she was really shockingly hungry. She had not eaten a meal in three days. There was a little restaurant in the *Grosse Opernstrasse* where they served a very fair meal for a mark, and she decided to go there and luxuriate. But she found that all the money she had left was two ten Pfennig pieces—not even a mark. And two weeks more to wait before her quarterly allowance would arrive!

She went to the bureau and pulled open the top drawer. From this she took a small box in which she kept what little jewelry she had. There was an emerald and pearl necklace—Ulrich had bought it for her in Florence—and she had not had the heart to decline it. Then there were a few brooches, lavallières and pins of no great value, and an old-fashioned set of jewelry set in turquoise and pearls, consisting of enormous pendants and earrings—brooch, belt and shawl pins, bracelets and rings. It had been her father's wedding gift to her mother.

She wrapped the set up in a linen handkerchief and thrust it into her reticule. She had done all this very quickly, as if to banish thought and self-reproach. At the door she paused before passing beyond the threshold.

"Forgive me, Mother," she said half aloud, as if addressing herself to some one in the room, "I love my man more than you loved yours. You would have starved for my father, but you would not have sinned for him."

She went to a pawnbroker's first, received a pittance in return for the jewelry, and then sought out the restaurant in the *Grosse Opernstrasse* to partake of the Lucullan repast at *eine Mark*.

She had hardly started eating her meal, when she became interested in some of the phrases spoken by three ladies engaged in an animated conversation near her. They were speaking English.

"I guess the royal princes are all a pretty dissolute lot. They say this one is a perfect devil."

"I am dying to see him."

"You will when the Opera opens; he goes every night."

"Is he the one who is a physician?"

"Yes—he was in New York some time ago. They say he fell madly in love with some woman in a humble walk of life, a school-teacher, or a manicure-girl——"

Here the third lady who had not spoken so far, intervened.

"No, no, a trained nurse."

Alice almost choked over her food. She could not swallow a morsel. Like the wedding guest, she could not choose but listen.

"But one hears nothing of her."

"That is why I do not believe the story."

"Perhaps she's a decent sort and keeps in the background."

"That sort of a woman a decent sort! Nonsense! They always get all they can out of a man. Last year his favorite was a married woman moving in Court circles. I will tell you her name some other time. But the august person's infatuation for her did not survive an unpleasant episode. The husband of the lady returned unexpectedly, and the illustrious personage was forced to

seek refuge in the wardrobe, among the husband's clothing, so rumor says, and as the husband smokes heavy Havanas, and the illustrious personage smokes nothing but cigarettes of a particularly dainty blend, one can image what a delightful hour he passed among hubbie's old clothes. The lady relied on her ingenuity to get her husband out of the room for a few minutes, so she could let her royal lover escape from his ignominious hiding place, but the husband went right to bed. She was forced to follow, and the illustrious personage, invisible but within distinct hearing distance, was compelled to remain wedged in among the tobacco-saturated clothing."

The three ladies bubbled over with merriment.

Alice felt hot and cold by turns. She was unable to move. She must hear more.

"Tell the other story, Mary," said the first voice; "the other story is even funnier."

"A little *danseuse* of the opera was his inamorata some seasons ago. She pretended to be very modest, and would not permit him to see her undressed. He presented her with a little house, a pavilion, I believe they call it here, and he had the window of the bathroom so cleverly constructed that it partially opened into the air, partially into a sort of closet or pocket in the wall large enough to admit an adult person. Here, from this secluded vantage-ground, he was able to observe the lady when she stepped into her bath, and by accurately describing to her a slight blemish on her thigh, he was able to prove that he had outwitted her."

Alice left the table, her food untouched. She paid her precious mark and left the place.

What an experience for a woman to go through!
"That sort of a woman always gets all ~~she~~ ~~can~~ out of a

man." The cruel sentence reverberated in her ears, and propelled her onward in a sort of blind horror. What, after all, was there about the stories to make her so miserable? She knew what his life had been—he had boasted of it himself—why then should she take these two wretched stories to heart?

Recollections of little endearments, the memory of a night when he had kissed her feet to awaken her, came rushing back upon her. A horrible jealousy began stinging and lashing her. What was the use of being insincere with herself? She loved Ulrich, and it drove her frantic to think that another woman had been the same to him as she was.

And there were dozens of women in this very city, perhaps more, who could point to Ulrich and say, "That man was once my lover." Dozens of women! The thought nauseated her. She tried in vain to make herself believe that it was not jealousy that was troubling her, that it was fastidiousness. Before she had yielded herself to him, the fact that he had been living "a man's life" had appealed to her imagination, and it had flattered her vanity to be singled out by him; but since she had become his, since she realized and knew the intimacy that exists between lovers, it was insufferable to think that those lips which had kissed her mouth, her hair, her throat, her arms, had kissed the mouth, the hair, the throat, the arms of others. . . . Her imagination travelled on mercilessly. . . . She thrust the thoughts that assailed her like tongues of fire away from her. Fastidiousness—that was all it was, surely. The thought of his former loves annoyed her only as it would have harassed her to wear a garment previously worn by some one else! But she did not believe this herself.

The large clock on the *Neue Bahnhof* struck three.

In her perturbations, she had not noticed in what direction she was walking, or rather running, for her excitement had accelerated her gait. Fortunately she had travelled in a circle, and was near home. She ran the rest of the way, and reached her rooms in a quarter of an hour, wondering whether Ulrich had gotten there before her, for he had announced himself the day before as due at three o'clock.

With a sigh of relief, she perceived that he had not yet come, as she ran up the stairs, stumbling in her haste. Five minutes later he entered her rooms.

"I am late."

"Yes, I was afraid you were not coming," she answered.

He threw down his coat, without replying. She saw that he was angry. What had happened? His face was dark with suppressed fury; he did not even offer to kiss her.

"Alice," he said violently, after a moment's pause, "this has got to stop. You—we cannot go on like this."

"What do you mean?" she managed to say.

"I mean you cannot continue living here. Good heavens! I've got to come here, my coat collar turned up, my hat down over my eyes, to avoid recognition."

Alice turned deathly white. She could not speak.

He began to pace the floor, punctuating his sentences by striking at the leg of table or chair with his riding whip. He broke forth again:

"It is degrading for both of us; it is making a common intrigue of our love when we might be as the gods and enjoy our love and life and all the beauty and happiness which money can buy, if it were not for your obstinacy."

Until this moment she had been unable to utter a word. Now she regained the power of speech. She did not

mind seeing him angry, for he never appeared to better advantage than when he thoroughly lost his temper.

"I think it would be a good deal more degrading for me, at least," she replied with considerable spirit, "if I were to allow you to keep me, to accept money from you."

"Yet I accept your love, without making any return," he flared up. "What about that? Do you suppose I am less sensitive about my debt to you than you would be about yours to me? I am making you no return, none——"

"For what?" she demanded hotly. She had turned very white again. Her voice was trembling. "For what?" she asked angrily.

"For you—yourself, your love."

"Oh!"—her ejaculation was a moan. "That is precisely what I wanted to protect myself against. I am sorry for you if after knowing me all these months you do not yet realize that my love is not purchasable."

He became tender, conciliatory, apologetic.

"Alice, don't be childish. Why won't you comprehend, dear, that it's the way of the world for a man to take care of a woman when he accepts her love? A husband does it. It is right. It is natural. But you allow me to make you no return whatever. You give and give and give. You will never accept. I cannot go on like this. I am a man of wealth, a prince, and I am behaving toward you like a yokel. I cannot go on like this. I hate myself. I love you and cherish you more than I have ever loved or cherished anyone before. And before I have given ten times over in return for what I received to my ballet-girls, my show-girls, my singers, my *demi-mondaines*. I have never been in a woman's debt——"

"And you hesitate to be in mine, because you class me

with your ballet-girls, your singers, your *demi-mondaines*——”

He became furious again.

“Be quiet,” he cried, flourishing his whip about. So angry was he that he did not notice she was in danger of encountering it. She retreated before it. “Be quiet!” He stamped his foot. “You are twisting and turning everything I say.”

It was her turn to become tender and conciliatory.

“Ulrich,” she said soothingly, “don’t let us quarrel. What has made you so angry? Come, tell me. I knew you were angry before you came in. I knew it by the way you rapped. Something has happened. Tell me what.”

“No, I won’t tell you.”

He took a few more turns about the room and then came and sat down beside her. He took her hand with a gentleness that contrasted strangely with his former vehemence, and kissed it.

“It’s for your own sake, sweetheart,” he said. “I wish I could make you understand.”

“Ulrich, dear, I wish you were just a plain, ordinary, everyday citizen. How happy we could be then——”

“I don’t. I’m very fond of my rank.”

“Ulrich, what has happened?”

He began whipping his riding boot with his whip.

“That little obnoxious animal of a *portier*, when I came in—of course he has no idea who I am—made an impertinent remark about you and about my coming here so frequently. And the worst is I couldn’t horsewhip the fellow as he deserved, or he would have called a *gendarme* and my identity would have been discovered and your reputation irrevocably ruined.”

“Don’t be cross, Ulrich, dear.”

She put her arms about his neck and kissed him softly on the cheek.

He caught her to his breast.

"My darling, my darling," he whispered.

"Dearest, I have my new gown to show you. I hope you will like it."

"The ball dress?"

"Yes."

"No, don't show it to me. I am sure it is quite charming. And I do not want to spoil my pleasure of seeing you in it. Think, sweetheart, I have known you for over half a year; you have been my very own for four months, and I have never seen you in a ball dress."

He was all gentleness now. Even as he held her in his arms, he said:

"Alice, darling, don't you see that a change must be made in your mode of living?"

"Ulrich, do you realize you have broken your promise to-day? You promised me before we left New York, that if I would come and live with you abroad, you would never try to force me to accept things from you. You have broken that promise."

"Well, dearest," he replied with the utmost good-nature, "as long as I have already broken the promise, I might crack away at it a little more. I shall not desist until I get my way."

"I shall be seriously vexed with you, Ulrich, if you continue in this strain."

His good-humor vanished. He became angry again. His eyes flashed fire. He could not bear to have his will balked.

"I am not going to allow you to impose your absurd New England conscience on me much longer."

"I don't think I have imposed my absurd New England conscience on you very frequently."

"No?" He was sarcastic now, and stood bowing to her with mock courtesy. "No, oh, no. You do not impose it on me when you force me to see you in this unfashionable section of the city, when, for the sake of your reputation, you make me take the infernal risk every night I come here of making myself the laughing-stock of the country? Has it ever occurred to you just what a joke it would be on me if I were ever found out?"

She was tempted to retort that one joke more or less of that sort should hardly matter to him. She was thinking bitterly of the stories she had overheard that very day. But she answered quite meekly:

"I will move to any part of the city that you designate."

"And you will allow me to pay the rent and servants? No? Still obstinate! I thought so."

He began striding about again. She wished he would not be so noisy. The old lady downstairs was deaf, to be sure, but deaf persons have an unfortunate habit of hearing things not intended for them. But she lacked the courage to caution him. As if he divined her thoughts, he turned upon her again:

"It's humiliating, Alice. Why, I don't as much as dare to laugh heartily here, you have told me so often that we will be overheard."

"You seem to have no desire to-day to laugh, at any rate," she replied pungently.

"I have often wondered that you do not insist on a diver's helmet for us when we kiss—to muffle the sound."

"Oh, Ulrich dear, do be nice."

Her lips trembled, tears came to her eyes. He said loftily:

"May I offer you your favorite cozy corner for a nice, comfortable cry? My shoulder is at your disposal."

But instead of the gentle raillery which he usually employed when teasing her about her facility in crying, there was a cruel, ironic note to his voice that cut like a knife.

"Alice, what have you eaten to-day?"

She pulled herself together.

"What a funny question, Ulrich! You are beginning to be a frightful tyrant. Am I not to order a meal any more without having to report afterward——"

"I want to know of what your dinner consisted."

"I never remember what I eat. It's too prosaic a topic."

"Look here, Alice. Do you want me to tell you what that foul-mouthed little animal downstairs said to me to-day?"

"I asked you before to tell me."

"I gave him a ten-mark piece as I came in, and he said, 'You're a fine fellow; you look as if you had enough to eat yourself, and let your friend starve. But the worse a man treats a woman the better she likes him. Otherwise your handsome'—no, I won't tell you what he called you—'wouldn't be satisfied to eat unbuttered rolls three times a day and nothing else with them, when, I bet you, my fine gentleman drinks champagne and Laubenheimer, and eats *Champignons* and *Pasteten*.'"

"How absurd!"

Alice mustered a laugh, but it did not ring true in her own ears.

Ulrich caught her by the wrist.

"Is it true?" he asked.

"Ulrich, you are a goose! Don't, dear, you are hurting me. Come, be nice. Let me show you my gown,

and you will realize that a woman who has the money to pay for such a dress does not starve herself for lack of funds."

"If you show me the dress, I will cut it into shreds with my whip."

She was on her way to the wardrobe to get the dress, and without turning, she halted where she stood when his words fell. What, in heaven's name, was she to do? She had never seen him like this before. He had always been so tender, so affectionate. What was wrong with him or with her to-day? Perhaps if she kissed him? She turned and walked toward him. But his face was so forbidding, his lips so narrow and cruel, that her heart quailed and she shrank back. She remembered that Sylvia had told her that her Uncle Joachim had the reputation of striking his women when angry. . . . She became confused. She became afraid. Finally she sat down miserably on a little footstool as near him as she dared.

"Alice, tell me the truth."

"I have never told you anything but the truth."

She was amazed at the placidity with which she uttered the falsehood. Had she not lied to him five minutes before when she boasted of her means?

"Alice, you are the only woman I have ever loved—don't you see what misery you are inflicting upon me?"

He covered his eyes with his hands. She was surprised to see how deeply he was stirred. In a low, dove-like voice she said:

"Ulrich, I am clinging to my last bit of self-respect. Give me time, dear. Perhaps I will see things differently a little later on."

He did not change his attitude, but sat there like dejection personified. She leaned over, and placing her

hands over his, tried to draw them away from his eyes. Unconsciously he resisted. She slid to her knees. "Ulrich dear, Ulrich," but he paid no heed. Her hands dropped away from his. She sat huddled together in a forlorn little heap at his feet.

Suddenly he looked up, and seeing her there, her face at his knee, he stretched out his arms to her. She threw herself into them with mad abandon. "Ulrich!" she gasped, "Ulrich, Ulrich!" It seemed as if her very soul were being sent forth to meet him as she rapidly pronounced his name three times over, as if she were sending forth the quintessence of herself to appeal to him as no mere words would possibly appeal.

He took her roughly by the shoulders and pressed his fingers into her tender flesh until she winced. But there was more concentrated actual affection in his roughness than in any caress he could have bestowed upon her at this moment. They sat in silence for a moment, then he said abruptly, as if the thought had come to him suddenly:

"Alice, I told you a long time ago that if ever you demanded the sacrifice of me I would make it without parley or protest. If you are not at peace with your conscience, if you are suffering, you have only to remind me of my promise."

At the word "sacrifice" the blood mounted to her face. How abysmally selfish he was! How was it possible that this man, so exquisitely delicate where her physical wellbeing and comfort were concerned, could complacently ride rough-shod over all her finer sensibilities? If he had begged her to marry him, instead of offering to make "the sacrifice," she would still have refused, so intense was her horror that he would later on regret the marriage and blame her for his unhappiness and dis-

content. But she did not speak out her bitterness. She loved him too dearly. She was too much afraid that their quarrel of before might be renewed.

"Do not let us speak of marriage," she said, and springing from the floor to his knees, and bending his head forward, she began kissing his chin, his eyebrows with lingering, gliding kisses that he had taught her. Then she said:

"Bend your head down, dearest, so I may kiss my little bald spot," and tilting his head forward, she began showering kisses upon his head.

"Don't, don't waste all those kisses on the back of my head," he begged.

Laughing, she tossed his head from her, and twirled it about so that they were face to face. But his eyes were still cold and hard, unwarmed by the flicker of love-light which she had expected to find there. She felt chilled, hurt. She wanted to say, "Why don't you kiss me, Ulrich?" But the woman in her rebelled. The woman had gone as far as she might without abasing herself. So she said instead:

"Are you still angry, Ulrich?"

He gave her a smile and laid his cheek against hers. It was a gesture of pure affection. She knew it to be such and was satisfied. A feeling of peace came over her. But he was ill at ease. He felt as if the anger that had passed through him had drained him of the capacity for passion, and he accused himself of indelicacy and cruelty in not responding to her advances, when she had behaved with such sweetness, such humility after the harassing interview through which they had gone.

He passed his hand under her arm. He felt her sigh deeply against his cheek. She fell back in his arms. Her head rested heavily upon his shoulders; her entire body,

relaxed. Her face was transformed. Never, he thought, looking at her with cold, discerning approval, had he seen her more supremely lovely. Why then did his pulses not leap at sight of her? Why did not the sight of her emotion kindle his? She uttered a moan half of pleasure, half of weariness. Slowly her eyes opened. Their expression was infinitely alluring. Her lips fell apart, revealing the gleam of her teeth, white coral behind the pink.

He reflected that even the purest of women has in her something of the courtesan and is bound to reveal this attribute at some time or other to the man she loves. He remembered Balzac's saying that the ideal wife is the cold, pure, unapproachable companion in the eyes of the world, but her husband's desirable and passionate mistress when alone with him.

Suddenly a wave of emotion swept over him, towering like the wall-like combers that rise out of the incoming tide of a stormy sea. His face approached hers with torturing slowness. His mouth closed upon her half-open lips.

CHAPTER XVII

Three days later Alice met the little Hereditary Prince for the first time. She was waiting in one of the ante-chambers on the main floor of the *Palais* for Sylvia, when little Eitel Egon came running into the room to pick up a runaway ball.

He was a delicate, fragile-looking child, with the pale von Dette complexion and the wonderful von Dette eyes. His features, too, were unmistakably the features of his royal race, as Alice knew them in the faces of Sylvia and of her lover, and in all the family likenesses that stared down from the walls of the great picture gallery that adjoined the throne room, painted largely by famous painters—Largillière, Pourbus, Lely.

The little lad stood and looked at her searchingly, displaying quite as much vulgar curiosity in the new face as the child of any commoner.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I'm Miss Vaughn—Alice Vaughn."

"What a funny name! I shall not be able to remember it unless I hear it again. Would you mind repeating it?"

Alice laughed and repeated "the funny name."

"Is it French or Italian?"

"Neither. I give you another guess."

The child flushed. He was ashamed of having blundered.

"I am studying French and English and German, one language each day," he explained. "It confuses me

dreadfully, but Cousin Ulrich wishes me taught in that way, and I must do what Cousin Ulrich wishes. I guess your name is English. Isn't it?"

"To be exact, I am an American," she replied.

"Then I ought to speak with you in English. To-day is my German day, but when I meet visitors of other nationalities, I am to speak to them in their own language, so if any mistake is made, I, and not they, am embarrassed. Cousin Ulrich says a gentleman always tries to put others at their ease, and so I must learn to do so now. But you, Miss Vaughn, oh——" He stopped speaking and began laughing uproariously after the manner of a child. He stopped laughing as suddenly as he had started.

"I beg your pardon," he said gravely, "that was very rude of me."

He came and sat down beside Alice, and sat looking up at her with admiration written upon his dark, thin little face.

"I am going to call you Miss Schatzie, that means 'sweetheart,'" he said. "Only I wish you weren't so old."

"So old? You funny little boy! Do I seem so very old?"

"Rather old to be my Schatzie," said the youngster. "You will be quite wrinkled by the time I am a man like Cousin Ulrich."

"You seem very fond of your Cousin Ulrich," said Alice hurriedly.

"Everybody is fond of Cousin Ulrich. You will be fond of him, too, when you meet him. And he will like you, because you are so fair. Cousin Ulrich says fair women are the handiwork of God, and dark women are the handiwork of the Devil."

"Your Cousin Ulrich surely didn't say that to you?"

"No, he said it at a ball one evening. And all the fair women kept repeating it in the hearing of the dark women the next day. Cousin Sylvia was perfectly furious."

Again the little chap doubled up with laughter. Suddenly he said in a confidential tone:

"I do not like Cousin Sylvia."

"It is wrong not to love one's relatives."

"Look here Fraeulein Schatzie," said the youngster, his eyes twinkling with mischief as he gave her this name, "you don't know me long enough to preach to me. I get enough of that as it is, I can tell you."

Alice was vastly amused.

"Who preaches to you?" she asked, "Cousin Ulrich?"

"Cousin Ulrich! Oh, no. He spans me when I'm bad. That is, to be exact, he only spanked me once, and that was long ago. I deserved it. Cousin Ulrich is very fair. I had told a lie. Cousin Ulrich says it is the unforgivable sin for a gentleman to lie, unless you can spare a woman embarrassment by lying. Then a falsehood is permissible. When we were in the country in the *Sommerschloss* the next summer, the miller's little daughter, with whom I used to play, began to cry one evening because I hadn't kissed her good-bye. The drawbridge had been opened for a canal-boat, and as it was late, and my French governess was in a hurry to get home and prink up for supper, I walked back to Lieschen over a narrow plank that had been thrown across the canal. I tripped and fell into the canal, and one of the boatmen fished me out, and the miller gave the man a two-mark piece, and the man grumbled, and said it was '*verdammt wenig*' for saving a prosperous miller's son, and my governess stormed about like a mad woman be-

cause I had been taken for a miller's boy, and Lieschen sat and howled, and everything was lovely. And all that fuss only because I had forgotten to kiss Lieschen at the start. Nor was that all. When I got home, Cousin Ulrich wanted to know how I had gotten myself so wet, and I said I had fallen into the canal in trying to save my cap. Then my governess said, '*Mon Dieu, Monsieur le Prince, l'enfant ne dit pas vrai.*' Then Cousin Ulrich looked very grave, and said, '*Du kleiner Schlingel*, now come and tell me the truth.' So I had told him I had fibbed because he had once said it was all right to fib in order to spare a woman embarrassment, and I didn't suppose the miller's Lieschen would like all the world to know she cried because I hadn't kissed her. Then Cousin Ulrich laughed till the tears stood in his eyes, and later I heard him say to the *Hofmarschall*, '*Der Bengel faengt jung an.*' But we are speaking German all the time, and it is wrong of me to make you speak in my own tongue unless you really want to."

"I don't mind in the least, especially as so far I have listened principally."

Eitel Egon laughed delightedly at this sally.

"Very well," he said, "I will give you a chance now to say something. You speak German very well. Of course I would have to say that, even if it were not true, but it is true. You make one mistake only—you say *Du* to me when you should say *Sie*. You must not use the familiar 'thou,' you know, in addressing me, as you would in speaking to another child."

"Mustn't I?" said Alice, a trifle confused. The child's *sangfroid* was uncanny.

"Perhaps you do not know who I am. You're not very much interested in me, I'm afraid, or you would have asked. Allow me to introduce myself." Rising,

he gave the military salute, bringing his lithe little body into the sharp, angular position required. "I am Joachim Eduard Alfons Georg Eitel Egon von Dette, Baron Oelsen, Graf von und zu Strelin, Graf von Meiningen, Herzog von Freylingen, Fuerst zu Haller, von Duodocollo, von Mellberg, und Erbprinz von Hohenhof-Hohe."

Alice rose and dropped him a courtesy.

"I am delighted to make your Highness's acquaintance," she said.

"I hope you mean it," said Eitel Egon, settling himself comfortably in the sofa, and drawing two apples from as many pockets. "Do you eat apples?"

"Sometimes."

"Will you have one now?"

"No, thank you."

"Do you mind if I eat one?"

"Why should I?"

Eitel Egon reflected.

"Some people object very much to others eating apples in their presence. Cousin Sylvia hates it. She says that when I eat an apple I make a noise like a cow chewing. You are not attached to the Court in any way, are you, Miss Schatzie?"

"Your Highness has guessed correctly."

"Whom have you come to see?"

"Princess Sylvia."

"O-o-oh!" The little lad's apple almost dropped from his jaw. "Dear me, I hope you won't repeat what I have said to you about not liking her."

"I have already forgotten what you said in that regard."

The little prince regarded Alice gravely.

"That's the sort of answer Cousin Ulrich gives me," he said. "I shall have to tell Cousin Ulrich about you,

because you're clever, and Cousin Ulrich says clever people are very scarce, particularly at Hohenhof-Hohe."

"How do you know that I am clever?"

"If you weren't, you would have said, 'Why do you think I am clever?' You see, you're not afraid to own your cleverness."

The child's penetration amazed the girl.

"Who taught you to make such fine distinctions?" she asked.

"Cousin Ulrich, of course. What the others teach me is tommyrot. I learn more in five-minutes' talk from Cousin Ulrich than in five days from all the others put together. To be honest with you, I heard Cousin Ulrich make that very distinction one day. I merely remembered it. When I am grown-up, I am going to study medicine and be a famous doctor like Cousin Ulrich."

"And who is to reign over this country?"

"Oh, the ministers of State and of the Interior and the old *Hofmarschall* and Freifrau von Schwellenberg. My grandfather says it doesn't require any brains to rule, merely manners, a set of figure-heads and enough money to stable them. But Cousin Ulrich says that is not so. You haven't asked me why I don't like Cousin Sylvia?"

"No, and I don't intend to."

"Why not?"

"Because it's none of my business."

"I think I'll tell you, nevertheless."

"I would prefer not to have you tell me."

"But if I insist?"

"I am sure your Highness is too much of a gentleman to force his confidence on some one who does not desire it."

"Now that again is like Cousin Ulrich. You're very different from the rest. If I had told any of the other

ladies that I didn't like Sylvia, they'd have had me on their lap, and would have kissed me and cuddled me and chucked me under the chin and called me '*suesser kleiner Erbprinz*,' and even if I hated their kissing me more than I do, I wouldn't have told them in a hundred years, not even to get rid of them. But I want to tell you, because you are different, and I don't want you to think me a sneaking, horrid little boy for saying I don't care for my cousin."

"Well, then, supposing you tell me."

"Thank you for allowing me," said Eitel Egon. "I don't like Sylvia because she fibs all the time. She pretends to like people whom she detests, because they can be of use to her. Oh, I know, I know——"

"Your Highness is very indiscreet to say a thing of that sort to a friend of the Princess's."

"Oh, dear, now you do think me a horrid, sneaking little boy, after all."

"No," said Alice, "I think you a very charming, foolish, talkative little boy."

The little lad stood stock-still, and regarded Alice fixedly. Tears of mortification stood in his eyes, and his lips twitched with anger. His resemblance to Ulrich was extraordinary.

"I ought to hate you for saying I am foolish and talkative," he said, "but I don't. I like you even better than before. But please don't say anything to hurt me again. If—if—I displease you, just tell me nicely, but don't say anything that hurts."

Ulrich passed the open door at this moment.

"Egon, I have been looking for you everywhere."

"Cousin Ulrich, I want to introduce you to the sweetest lady in the world."

"What, sweeter even than the miller's daughter?"

asked Ulrich meaningly, feigning great astonishment.

"Don't tease me, Cousin Ulrich! Ah, you are laughing at me—both of you—you have met before."

The child looked so disappointed that Alice, with a quick, maternal gesture, put out her arm, and encircling the child's shoulder, drew him toward her.

"You're not going to be angry with me, little Prince Joachim Eduard Alfons Georg Eitel Egon, are you?"

"You had heard all my names before, too," said the child, reproachfully. "You couldn't have remembered them from hearing them once only."

"You're a public character, you know," said Alice coaxingly. "Won't you forgive me?"

The child smiled.

"I forgive you," he said quite gravely. "And if you wish, Miss Schatzie, you may kiss me."

CHAPTER XVIII

The night of the first Court ball of the season, at which Alice was to make her first bow to the entire Court, finally arrived. She entered the ballroom in Sylvia's suite. Sylvia had "commanded" the arm of one of Ulrich's aides, Lieutenant von Hollen, "the second wickedest man in the kingdom, my dear," according to Sylvia's description, the doubtful distinction of being the wickedest man going to Ulrich. Sylvia's ladies-in-waiting had each an officer of the Life Guards as an escort, Frau von Schwellenberg a *Cuirassier*, and Alice a Black Hussar, whom she had never seen before, and whose name was quite impossible to remember.

Although she had read Thackeray's "The Four Georges," by this time she knew enough of Court etiquette and the Court personnel not to expect to see the ladies bring their knitting to a Court ball, she was wholly unprepared for the magnificent scene which the ballroom presented.

The hall itself was very lavishly decorated with much stucco work and many gilt Cupids hovering among natural tinted, elaborately designed foliage and flowers. The hangings and upholstery were all in pale blue velvet with deep fringes of gold. The royal "D" was blazoned everywhere—on chairs, on settees, on the blue velvet curtains that screened the enormously high and wide windows, and the splendid uniforms of the officers, the pale-tinted gowns, the glistening shoulders and gleaming arms of the women added to the brilliance of the scene.

Princess Sylvia took her place upon a small raised dais—very slightly raised, only—at the extreme end of the room, upon which stood two prodigiously ornamental chairs. Immediately her little party was surrounded by a buzzing lot of young and youngish officers, all very magnificent in gold lace and full dress uniforms. Alice did not even attempt to remember their names. She found to her surprise that her dance-card was not to be filled for her, but that she was at liberty to dispose of her dances as she chose. That was something of a novelty. She rather liked it.

Suddenly a hush fell upon the room. Ulrich had entered with his two aides at his side, von Hollen and von Garde. Both of the aides were, of course, in full dress, and von Garde looked wonderfully handsome. But Alice gave him a mere glance. It was not for him that her heart was beating so madly. Ulrich claimed her undivided attention. He wore the simple court dress affected by civilians and men of a rank so high, like himself, that the choice between uniform or *Escarpins*, the black satin knee breeches of court dress, rested entirely with themselves. Upon his breast glittered a multitude of orders. The splendidly uniformed young officers seemed a mere gorgeous background for the stately, distinguished figure in black walking between them.

The young men in the room had swarmed about Sylvia's entourage. Conversely every woman in the room, so it seemed to Alice's bewildered eyes, seemed to drift toward Ulrich's group. A sudden jealousy sprang up in her. Was the woman, the married woman with whom Ulrich had had a *liaison* the previous season, present? If so, would she attract him, hold his attention?

Ulrich, she saw, had disengaged himself from a cluster of ladies who had almost encircled him and his two aides,

and stood apart with a very smartly gowned woman of about thirty, with whom he continued speaking with the air of languid indifference which he habitually wore in public. The lady was slight in build, fair, very vivacious and had the *grand air* which Alice had admired so much in Sylvia. She had very much manner. The girl felt that she admired her immensely and would like to know her.

"Who is the lady with whom Prince Ulrich is speaking?" she asked of Fraulein von Hornung.

"That—oh, Baroness von Hess." Fraulein von Hornung discreetly lowered her voice. "She was the Prince's favorite last year. She would very much like to win him back, so some folks say, but I do not believe it. She had too narrow an escape last year, when——" Suddenly interrupting herself, the voluble little lady-in-waiting exclaimed: "Good heavens! What is the matter with you, Miss Vaughn? Your cheeks are crimson. Really, you Americans are too ridiculously straight-laced! To blush like that merely because a man's failings are mentioned. Didn't you know the Prince was that sort of a man?"

"I had heard as much," Alice managed to say quite placidly.

Fraulein von Hornung gave her a searching look.

"Poor thing," she thought, "at least I have warned her against him."

"What sort of a woman is this Baroness von Hess?" Alice presently asked.

"A very clever woman, really a very nice, charming, good-hearted soul. She is very popular with everybody. Don't you admire her manner?"

"Immensely," said Alice honestly, though her heart was beating fast.

"There is such a funny little story connected with the Baroness and the Prince," the lady-in-waiting continued. "Baron von Hess came home late one evening——"

"I have heard the story," Alice coldly interrupted the recital.

"And don't you think it funny?"

"Very."

The girl turned her head away. Ulrich had left the Baroness and was slowly making his way across the room to their group. It would be intolerable, she thought, to have to speak to him now, to even meet him. Sweet heavens! Would people next year be saying of her, "She was the Prince's favorite last season?"

"*Herr Adjutant*," she hurriedly addressed von Garde, "is it permitted to stroll about the room?"

"You—certainly. Only the ladies-in-waiting are expected to remain with the Princess. May I escort you?"

They walked off together just as Ulrich came up from the other side of the room. Alice saw a look of annoyance cross his face, but she pretended stonily not to see him. It steadied her nerves considerably to be walking along with this exceedingly complacent, handsome, well-bred young man. He seemed to be a great favorite with the women, judging from the ingratiating smiles that greeted him everywhere. Alice remembered that he was considered "*die grosse Partie*" of Hohenhof-Hohe, and that his fortune as well as his rank and his personal character made him the most eligible young man in the kingdom.

Suddenly she became aware of a small, smirking man bearing down upon them. He had a cast in his eye, and he lurched as he walked.

"Who is ~~that~~ Rigoletto-like creature?" she asked of von Garde.

"Mercy me!" said von Garde. "Our *Hofmarschall*. Now, Miss Vaughn, if you were other than you are, I would say to you, 'Beware.' For any secret, personal or on matters of state, that a newcomer possesses, that little person will try to ferret out. There is, of course, no occasion to give you such advice. You need not mind his meddlesomeness or his malice." Addressing the man, he said: "*Herr Hofmarschall*, good evening!"

The old, hunched figure, with the small mouse-eyes, halted.

"*Herr Adjutant*," he whimpered, "will you not introduce me to the fair American about whom everyone is raving?"

"Miss Vaughn, I have the pleasure of presenting our admirable Master of Ceremonies, Freiherr von Bar-dolph."

"Known as the man with the kind heart and the wicked tongue," smiled the *Hofmarschall*, completing the introduction.

"I always thought it was the reverse," said von Garde laughing—"the man with the wicked heart and the kind tongue."

"Tut, tut, do not believe him, Miss Vaughn." The *Hofmarschall* was ready to catalogue his virtues right there, but von Garde cut him off brusquely.

"Miss Vaughn, I give the *Hofmarschall* just ten minutes' time to practise his Mephistophelian arts on you—then I return to rescue you from his clutches."

He bowed, and clicking his heels, turned and was gone. Alice's eyes looked after him. Laughter was on her lips, a burden was lifted from her heart. What a fine, frank specimen of a man he was! Again she envied the woman he would love and make his wife, and she wished that she might have loved such a man—

candidly, openly. She blushed and turned to von Bar-dolph, whose little mouse-eyes were riveted on her face. Perhaps he thought her in love with von Garde. So much the better.

"Do you find your first Court ball entertaining, Miss Vaughn?"

"Very."

"You are in an enviable position. The duties of a lady-in-waiting are something of a bore. Not being attached to our little Court in any official capacity, you are free as the air to do as you like, because of your friendship with——"

The *Hofmarschall*, whose lungs were as sound as leather, here unaccountably developed a cough.

"Princess Sylvia," said Alice quickly. "What a disagreeable little cough you have, *Herr Hofmarschall*!"

"Curious, you are the second person to comment upon my cough. Prince Ulrich also was gracious enough to remark it."

"And offered, I suppose, to cure you of it?" She came to a dead stop, adding, as if in afterthought, "in his capacity of physician, I mean."

The old man smiled in sheer delight at her deftness in paying him back, and at her courage in daring to show him so plainly that she understood his innuendo. With the swiftness of a swordsman who has recognized a worthy adversary, he decided to use his utmost skill to foil her in the duel of wits in which they had engaged. She was quick-witted, keen, had courage. It were false delicacy to spare her.

"You know then that His Highness is an eminent physician?"

"Certainly, it was in a hospital that I first met the Prince and Princess."

"His Highness excels in many respects, not merely in medicine."

"So I find. Everybody seems so anxious to discuss him." She smiled roguishly.

"She is adorable," thought the *Hofmarschall*. "I do not wonder at Ulrich's infatuation."

"We are very proud of him," the *Hofmarschall* continued. "Just look at him now, standing there between his aides, von Garde and von Hollen, a very wild young man, my dear young lady, but very popular with the ladies."

"They usually are, aren't they?" Alice summoned a look of most sublime innocence.

"It is a little vanity of the Prince's to surround himself with men as fair as he is dark," continued the *Hofmarschall*, "as a proper foil for his own handsome, aristocratic person. We, his loving subjects, pretend not to notice this little eccentricity. So you, too, Miss Vaughn, must not betray what I have told you, but must feign blindness in this respect."

"I shall certainly not betray your confidence, *Herr Hofmarschall*," said Alice gravely.

She laughed. It was a delicious, full-throated, bird-like sort of a laugh, and the *Hofmarschall*, crabbed, vixenish and furious with her though he was for being so beautiful and self-possessed, could not help but laugh also.

"It was rather unkind of you to tell me, though," Alice continued. "If you had allowed me to discover this vanity of the Prince's by myself, I should have been at liberty to tease him about it, as I am not one of his loving subjects."

She stressed the word "loving" ever so lightly. The *Hofmarschall's* mouse-eyes squinted ominously. He said:

"They are the three handsomest men in the kingdom, Miss Vaughn."

With polite indifference, she replied:

"A good-looking trio, surely."

He went on:

"Do you admire fair men, or dark men, Miss Vaughn? Men of haughty and commanding presence, a little sinister even, or fair men, with eyes of innocent blue, and laughter in their hearts, sunshine upon their faces and honey upon their lips?"

Alice began to feel distinctly nervous. The diabolical old creature was carrying things too far.

She answered, a shade of arrogance in her voice:

"I am hardly prepared to answer. You'll find me rather provincial, I'm afraid, *Herr Hofmarschall*. I've been brought up to think it rather indelicate for young women to discuss types of men, fair, dark or medium, as if they were roans, or chestnuts, or bays."

"That's rather a pretty sentiment, at any rate," said the *Hofmarschall* approvingly. "I'm not at all certain that a little delicacy injected into our life at Court would not be a good thing. Do you know much of court régime?"

"Very little, *Herr Hofmarschall*. Only this, that royal personages, as far as I can judge, seem anxious to outshine their environment in one particular only—breeding—and that royal personages of either sex, in marrying a commoner, contract a morganatic marriage only, as a rule."

"Princess Sylvia has coached you?"

"Very little, as you see. I expect you to coach me a good deal more. You seem such a subtle, clever person."

The *Hofmarschall* almost winced. The audacity this

young American person displayed by her patronizing tone amazed him.

"Princess Sylvia may wish to take you in hand herself," he said stiffly.

"Princess Sylvia and I usually have more interesting topics to talk about," she replied loftily. "But I imagine it is a fertile subject for two persons who have little in common. I am sure you and I will come back to it, *Herr Hofmarschall*."

"The devil!" thought the *Hofmarschall*. "What a vixen! I wish Ulrich joy of her."

"Princess Sylvia and you seem to be on very intimate terms," he said significantly.

Quickly she retorted:

"The Princess was so gracious as to establish our friendship on a very democratic footing."

"The Princess," went on the *Hofmarschall*, "makes an excellent friend, but *when* she turns, *if* she turns, she changes into an implacable enemy."

Alice laughed.

"I hardly think," she said, "that an obscure, insignificant little American like myself will ever have occasion to inspire the Princess with an implacable hatred."

"Beauty such as yours is never insignificant."

The *Hofmarschall* bowed obsequiously.

"Do you know, *Herr Hofmarschall*, since I came to Hohenhof-Hohe four weeks ago, I have heard more comments upon my 'beauty' than I heard in America all my life?"

"Our men are presumably more gallant than yours," suggested the *Hofmarschall*.

"Or our women more beautiful."

At that moment von Garde appeared.

"Time's up, *Herr Hofmarschall*."

The *Hofmarschall* bowed and withdrew. Ulrich came across the room to meet her. All eyes were riveted upon him and upon her, as making her a perfunctory little bow, which seemed meagre and shallow after the obsequious genuflections of the other men, he asked her to open the ball with him.

"Please ask some one else, Ulrich, dear. I am a little nervous."

"I do not see why you should be. You are not only the most beautiful woman in the room, but you are wearing the smartest frock as well. Where did you get that gown, Paquin's?"

"Yes. That is the gown you wanted to slash into ribbons with your whip."

"What an act of vandalism that would have been!"

Both laughed in recollection of the episode. Lowering his voice, his eyes became eloquent.

"Be nice to me, dearest," he pleaded. "Walk through the room with me, to where Sylvia is sitting, and when you have seen the envy of every woman because you are on Prince Ulrich's arm, you will be quite willing, I think, to open the ball with him."

Smiling, she placed her hand on his arm. A tremor passed through her body. He noticed it, and looked down at her tenderly.

"I am afraid I shall betray myself, Ulrich, if I dance with you."

"Nonsense! But be careful. Don't call me by my first name in public, even if we are apparently alone. The pillars and posts have ears here."

As is frequently the case before dancing has started, all the people in the room seemed to be congregated in one part of the hall. As Alice and Ulrich approached this crowded corner, they both became silent. They were

the cynosure of all eyes, and indeed, it would have been difficult to conceive a more charming couple, he so languidly aristocratic and assured, she so dazzlingly fair, radiant and lovely. Happily Alice was unaware of the attention and comment they were exciting. She had caught sight of Baroness von Hess, who was speaking with three gentlemen, and she felt herself impelled by she knew not what inward force, to look at her again and again. The Baroness, on the other hand, did not pay her the compliment of even glancing at her. Entirely complacent and unconscious, she continued her conversation with her three friends.

Alice's blood became turbulent. She had the sensation of becoming frightfully pale. What a woman was this Madame von Hess was! What a magnificent air! Would she, similarly situated, be able to carry herself with such capital unconcern? Was it possible that Ulrich, having once loved that woman, should not sometimes think of her with regret, with longing? She remembered that before she came away with him, he had told her very frankly that he would not be able to get through three or four months without the love of some woman. If she had not come away with him, would he then, have gone back to Madame Hess? Good heavens! would he not go back to her one day even now?

Alice had noted each perfect detail that went to the making of the charming gown worn by the woman who suddenly loomed before her feverish imagination as a rival. Her own was as good. Ulrich had pronounced it superior, since he had told her that hers was the smartest frock present. But whereas this was her only ball gown, she was quite certain that the wardrobe of the Baroness was well-stocked with a multitude of ball

dresses quite as rich and attractive as that which adorned the Baroness's lively little person at the present moment. It had never occurred to her before that she could not appear again and again in the same ball dress, no matter how beautiful and lavish. The question of clothes suddenly assumed horrible proportions. And then the irritatingly polished manner of this woman. She herself had no manner whatever. It seemed impossible to her that Ulrich would not draw comparisons between them which would result disastrously for herself. She hoped and prayed that she and the Baroness would not meet face to face that evening. The Baroness would notice her agitation, and it would be an easy matter for such a finished woman of the world to humiliate her. She would never be able to cope as successfully with her, with some one of her own sex, as she had coped with the *Hofmarschall*.

One poor little drop of consolation remained. She was far more beautiful than the Baroness. On this point comparison was colossally in her favor. It was not vanity that told her this, for she was living through one of those sinister moments of self-realization when no soft, self-satisfied estimate that a woman may previously have entertained of herself will avail her. And now that she passed close by the Baroness, she was surprised to find that she was not only not beautiful, but almost homely. Her features were compressed and flat, giving her face a heavy, commonplace expression when in repose. When she spoke an undercurrent of charm became apparent, and veiled her homeliness. But suddenly, almost with a shock, Alice remembered the words Ulrich had spoken of the fascination which a homely woman may exert upon a man of fertile imagination because of her homeliness, not in spite of it. And to her tortured and contorted

fancy it was a foregone conclusion that the Baroness must have inspired those words.

Her preoccupation with these sombre reflections had one palpable advantage. She walked down and around that vast ballroom on the arm of her lover wholly oblivious of the insolent and curious glances bestowed on her by men and women alike, and her suffering, which seemed to freeze the blood in her veins, gave her outwardly more of a semblance of that coldly detached manner which she so admired and coveted, than she had ever shown before.

Ulrich was delighted with the impression he saw she was creating. He did not dare as much as glance at her for fear of showing his delight and tenderness, his pride, his love.

"What a bearing she has!" he thought, and he wondered he had never remarked it before.

Because of her bearing and cold aloofness, two factions began immediately to form that very evening. The one faction saw in her a cold-blooded, calculating adventuress, who, for very obvious worldly advantages had entered into or was aspiring to a *liaison* with the Prince. The other faction, all signs to the contrary, refused to believe her culpable, declaring that a woman so apparently calm and composed could not be otherwise than virtuous.

Ulrich led Alice to the little dais on which sat Princess Sylvia.

"Miss Vaughn refuses to dance the first dance with me," he complained.

"Alice is quite right," replied the Princess in a low voice. "I am surprised at your asking her. You know it would compromise her, and you will kindly remember she is here as *my* friend. You'll have to ask either Coun-

tess Olly, or Excellenz von Garde. I believe no woman of higher rank is present. Do see the *Hofmarschall* and get him to arrange the thing properly. You know what a fuss and pother a *faux pas* occasions, especially at the first ball of the season."

Ulrich obediently sent for the *Hofmarschall*, and the two gentlemen discussed the momentous question with the utmost gravity for upward of two minutes. Alice's sense of humor had been awakened by the absurd little episode, which was helping her to forget the Baroness.

Sylvia smiled at Alice, who was standing quite near the chair on which the Princess sat, and asked her whether the ball was going to bore her very much. As the other chair on the dais was not occupied—it was a huge, gilded, comfort-promising affair—Alice, in replying, seated herself on it. Instantly a ripple of laughter bubbled from Sylvia's lips, and Ulrich, who returned from his weighty conference with the *Hofmarschall* at the moment, also tried to control his merriment.

"What is the joke?" demanded Alice. "Have I made some *faux pas*?" She mimicked Sylvia ever so lightly as she employed the phrase which was one to which the Princess was partial. But the Princess was helpless with laughter, and Ulrich was struggling manfully to retain a dignified aspect. Everybody was looking at them, hugely amused.

Suddenly the truth dawned on the girl.

"I shouldn't have sat on that chair," she said. "It's the throne, or something, isn't it?" She, too, was laughing now. "How could I know? I thought thrones didn't exist nowadays excepting in *Hamlet*, *King John* and old plays like that."

Not wishing to rise abruptly, she dropped her kerchief to the floor, and arose, pretending to stoop for it. But

Ulrich had already picked it up for her, and was offering it with the same perfunctory, stiff little bow as before.

"Thank you, Prince. Isn't that a violation of Court etiquette—to stoop for a commoner?"

"It is never a violation of etiquette to render a service to a pretty woman—though she is an American and takes possession of the throne of my ancestors with high-handed violence."

His eyes were brimful of love. Sylvia bent forward, and whispered to him so that Alice might not hear:

"Careful, Ulrich. Your eyes literally blaze when you look at her. Everybody is watching you."

Several gentlemen grouped themselves about Sylvia. She arose and asked one of them to escort her around the room. It was a great compliment to the young officer whom she had selected, and he beamed with joy. At that moment a young, a very young officer in the uniform of a lieutenant of the Black Hussars came up. A quick glance passed between him and Sylvia.

The Princess touched Alice's arm with her fan.

"Miss Vaughn," she said, "my cousin, Prince Gunther, desires to be presented to you."

Alice remembered seeing his picture. He resembled Ulrich enough to be his younger brother.

Sylvia had left them, and the young Prince, with a dazzling smile, made her the same stiff, perfunctory little bow that Ulrich had bestowed upon her. The girl surmised that that bogey, Court etiquette, applied the yardstick to the very bows of princes. Respectfully he said:

"Will you accept my arm for a little stroll?"

"Thank you."

As they walked off together, he said in an honest, boyish, straightforward sort of way:

"I want a good long talk with you, Miss Vaughn. I hope we are going to be good friends."

"That's very amiable of your Highness," Alice retorted warily.

"Don't you think I resemble my cousin Ulrich?" he asked, as she thought, irrelevantly.

"Immensely," she replied.

"Ah, then you will like me," he said with considerable assurance.

For one moment Alice was dazed by the young prince's audacity, then boldly she said:

"I do not see that your resemblance to your cousin constitutes a reason for my liking you any more than that your resemblance to the Prince makes you witty because he is witty, or that his resemblance to you makes him impertinent."

Prince Gunther shook with laughter.

"You must think me a cad, Miss Vaughn," he said. "Allow me to explain. But first of all, I am going to take you into my confidence."

"I am not aware," Alice replied coldly, "that I have given you any reason for believing that your confidence would be welcome."

No, you have not. But you know the saying, 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do.' And since you have elected to live among us you might have the grace to fall in with our customs, one of which permits royalty to make confidences when and where it chooses."

"I believe," Alice said ironically, "that your resemblance to your cousin is more than skin-deep, after all."

Gunther laughed.

"Now for the confidence. You must know, Miss Vaughn, that Sylvia and I are in love with each other.

Oh, come now, Miss Vaughn, be a good fellow, and don't try to overawe me. We'll all be cousins some day—you, Sylvia and I, so why not be friends now?"

This startling communication, or query, betrayed Alice into a helpless:

"What?"

"You see," the Prince continued cheerfully, "Sylvia is so confoundedly ambitious. She won't marry me unless I am at least the second in succession. At present I am third. The outlook for me apparently hopeless. Heaven is my witness I don't care a fig for the crown of Hohenhof-Hohe, but I do care a whole fig orchard for Sylvia. I'm terribly keen about Sylvia. Now Sylvia is convinced that Egon will never live to reign. It's a horrid idea; I sincerely hope the cunning little beggar will live to enjoy life. But I don't discourage Sylvia's notion, not I. Consequently, in Sylvia's mind, Ulrich alone interposes between the throne and myself. Understand? Consequently Ulrich's to be gotten out of the way."

"Strychnine or prussic acid?" asked Alice ironically.

"Oh, neither, if you please. Sylvia is much too kind-hearted. She chooses a much pleasanter dose to be administered to Ulrich. Yourself!"

"Precisely what do you mean?" Alice gasped.

"Marriage to you, a full marriage, not a morgannatic one, would bar Ulrich. Do you understand now, my dear Alice?"

The blood mantled the girl's cheek. She was furiously angry.

"First of all, I must beg that your Highness will not address me by my first name."

"Future cousins, my dear! Don't try to sidetrack me. *Du musst mir Rede und Antwort stehen, mein suesses Cousinchen.*"

"I simply won't have you call me 'thou,' Prince Gunther."

"All *en famille*. Look here, Alice, cousin mine, as I devoutly hope, Sylvia would murder me outright if she knew I told you all this."

"Then why did you tell?"

"Because I want you to know you have our coöperation, our moral support."

"Coöperation in what, Prince Gunther, pray?"

She was more furious even than a moment ago. She could barely talk, she was so enraged.

"What's the use of beating about the bush?" said the young gentleman unconcernedly. "Look here, Alice, cousin mine, Ulrich is unscrupulous where women are concerned. Moreover, he's successful with women, men of our rank usually are. Pardon my brutality. If you balk him, as anyone who can tell a virtuous woman from the other kind, can see you will, he'll end by offering you marriage. Sylvia's and my support, our moral support, ought to be worth a good deal to you?"

"I think, Prince Gunther," said Alice with a sudden access of vigor, "that you are taking entirely too much for granted. You are taking for granted that your cousin cares for me. You are taking it for granted that I care for him. I consider you an extremely insolent and tactless young man, even if you are a prince."

Gunther became very pale. He bit his lip.

"For the love of mercy," he said, "don't go on in that strain. If you cut me, or are rude to me, Sylvia will suspect that I've been saying something. I beseech you to act as if nothing had happened."

"Very well, say no more," she commanded curtly.

She turned and faced him, and as she looked into the

woe-begone, boyish eyes of the young fellow, she relented.

"I didn't mean to make myself odious to you," he stammered, "really and truly."

Dancing began soon after, and as Alice had refused to dance the first waltz, she had ample time to meditate upon the strange remarks made by Gunther. Upon reflection it seemed to her that if anything she owed him a debt of gratitude for his frankness. Sylvia's friendliness was now explained. She wondered whether Ulrich suspected his cousin's little game. Was she to tell him or not? Did Sylvia and Prince Gunther really not suspect the relations which existed between Ulrich and herself? If the Princess believed her to be leading a virtuous life, what would she do on discovering the truth?

Alice felt herself turning hot and cold. She was too shrewd to believe, after this evening's grilling experience, that the *liaison* with Ulrich could remain a secret long, and if she desired to save her reputation, only one of two courses remained open to her. She could ask Ulrich to marry her, or she could break with him. But she had no illusions as to her capacity to fulfil the latter alternative. Her love for him was stronger than any consideration, stronger than sense of virtue or self-respect, stronger than any consideration of the world's opinion.

Then there was the matter of clothes, of living *standes-gemaess*. She could no longer blind herself to the fact that if she decided to continue in her present relation to Ulrich, she would sooner or later be forced to allow him to supply her with funds. It was out of the question that she continue starving herself as she had been doing. A few times during the evening everything had gone black

before her eyes, and of the manifold fears that beset her, the most immediate and salient one was that she might faint in Ulrich's arms while dancing with him.

"Miss Vaughn, can I not prevail on you to dance?"

Von Garde, who was sitting out the dance with her, was bending over her solicitously. She turned with a start. She had completely forgotten him.

"Yes, I believe I will dance, after all."

Anything was better than to sit and revolve in her mind the various thoughts that were tormenting her.

"Why do you always turn to the right?" she asked von Garde.

"We are not permitted to turn to the left at Court," von Garde replied.

"But I saw Prince Ulrich turn to the left a few times," Alice protested.

Von Garde smiled.

"Prince Ulrich has always been considered a law unto himself wherever he chooses to go and whatever he chooses to do or say. You will find dancing with him pleasanter than with ordinary mortals."

As Alice danced, the pain and the anguish which she had been enduring, seemed to leave her. She no longer dreaded the dance with him, and now that she felt the agreeable support of another man's arm about her waist, she felt a strange yearning for the pressure of the arm of the man she loved.

When she finally found herself in Ulrich's arms during a later dance, a sort of intoxication came over her. She gave him a smile as they started off. His arm trembled against her back. A little demon of mischief entered into her heart. She gave him another smile, a seductive, winning, wooing smile, a smile utterly inde-

corous and out of place in a ballroom. She saw Ulrich flush.

"Don't, don't," he murmured. "If you look at me like that again I shall kiss you right here regardless of consequences for us both."

She laughed and averted her face. Her vertigo was gone. Her feet were preternaturally light, her head strangely clear.

She danced a second dance with him and a third. But she escaped from his presence, and he from hers between dances. Both felt that it would be intolerable to be near to each other maintaining a sedate inactivity after the delirium of the dance.

Alice was the soul of animation during the interludes. Her usual pallor had left her, a faint pink bloomed on her cheek, her eyes were radiant, an effulgence seemed to be exuded by her person. She was more dazzlingly, blindingly lovely than ever. Men and women alike crowded about her, and she was charming with all. She hardly knew what she spoke of or what she listened to. But she was agreeable spontaneously, automatically almost, essaying to converse in her pretty, broken German, and apologizing charmingly for her mistakes.

Sylvia watched her in astonishment.

"She is transfigured," she whispered to Gunther. Quickly she added: "Look at Ulrich."

Ulrich had deliberately turned his back to Alice, and was talking to Excellenz von Garde, young von Garde's mother. But as soon as the music struck up for the next dance, he was back at the girl's side, and without looking at her, claimed her as his partner. From under the lowered lids, his eyes were flashing fire.

When he came to lead her away for the fourth dance, Sylvia said:

"Miss Vaughn, would you mind very much sitting out this dance with me? I have such a funny story to tell you."

There was nothing to do but to comply with the Princess' request, and Ulrich went off in quest of another partner. He could not help knowing how dearly the honor of a dance with him was prized, and he was good-natured enough to fulfill his obligations in this respect.

When they were alone, Sylvia said earnestly:

"Alice, dear, you positively must not dance with Ulrich again to-night. You are innocent, child, and see no harm in such things. But the world here is more censorious than the world you knew at home, and you must not permit either Ulrich or Gunther to make you conspicuous in any way."

"Very well," said Alice meekly. A sense of shame came over her. She innocent!

She was glad enough to escape from Sylvia when von Hollen and von Garde came up simultaneously and asked for the dance. She did not like von Hollen. There was a heavy, sensual look in the young man's face that made her shrink from him. So she chose von Garde, but was reluctantly forced to promise von Hollen the succeeding dance.

That Sylvia's warning was not a needless one, was attested by a subsequent talk with the *Hofmarschall*.

"We have a Court Gazette in our excellent little town," he explained, his malevolent eyes fixed searchingly upon her face, "and in this paper is a column called *Wurstzipfel*—Ends of Sausages would be the English equivalent—all the doings at Court are chronicled therein. You will share a *Wurstzipfel* to-morrow with Prince Ulrich, because you have danced so often with his Highness."

The room danced before Alice's eyes. Odious, mali-

cious, sly old animal! Did he hope to embarrass her to the point of committing an indiscretion? It was with the thought uppermost in her mind that Ulrich would never forgive her if she did not make some tart retort, that she asked, looking very girlish, very unsophisticated, very innocent:

"Have you no Censor in Hohenhof-Hohe?"

"Certainly, Miss Vaughn. But it is hardly *lèse majesté* to say that his Highness devoted himself exclusively to the most beautiful woman in the room, in the country, perhaps in all Europe."

Alice shrugged her shoulders. It was a trick she had picked up from Sylvia. It robbed her of some of her girlishness, gave her an air of worldliwiseness, and even before she spoke the *Hofmarschall* saw that he had been wrong in believing that he was succeeding in breaking down her self-possession.

"I should think," she said languidly, luxuriously lying back among the cushions of her chair, "that no matter what else is mentioned in your *Wurstzipfel* the Public Censor would disapprove of seeing royalty embodied therein. We provincial New Yorkers, you see, deem ends of sausages fit only to feed to dogs or to bait rats with."

Purposely she introduced a shade of insolence into her voice, and her words and manner infuriated the old man. A sign of weakness on her part might still have placated him. Now he was become her indomitable enemy.

The *Hofmarschall* sought out Princess Sylvia. She was sitting in a corner of the conservatory with Gunther, who detested the *Hofmarschall*, and ran away from the ferret-eyed little man as soon as he could.

"Well, *Herr Hofmarschall*?" she asked. There was challenge in her tone. She knew the Master of Cere-

monies well enough to be on her mettle with him at all times.

"I have had a little talk with *your* American friend Princess."

"So I observed." Sylvia's voice was dry and hard

"*Your* friend, as she was careful to impress on me."

"My friend, certainly! I had already told you that *Herr Hofmarschall*. Was Miss Vaughn's word necessary to corroborate mine?"

"I confess, Princess, I shall be frank with you; for once I do not quite follow your little game—do not quite comprehend why you elect to play the part of fairy-godmother of love to the redoubtable Ulrich and the fair American."

"All things come to him who waits, *Herr Hofmarschall*."

"That again, so Sphinx-like, so à la Oracle of Delphi."

Sylvia remained mute. The *Hofmarschall* smoothed his creaseless gloves with care.

"Are you quite sure, Princess," he asked gently, "that you are not overshooting your mark this time? The young lady is no fool, by any means. She is clever, very clever, and cleverness allied to beauty so flawless and exquisite as hers, makes a very formidable adversary. Ulrich the redoubtable seems much smitten."

"*Et tu, Brute?*" said Sylvia sarcastically.

The *Hofmarschall* protested feebly.

Sylvia laughed. She became animated and pleasant.

"Then she strikes you as being very beautiful? Doesn't she?"

The *Hofmarschall* was still busy with his gloves.

"A face to change the map of empires," he said carelessly.

"Ah!"

The ejaculation was what he had waited for. There was no need to look at Sylvia's face. The inflection of her voice told him all.

"And clever, I think, *Herr Hofmarschall*, you said you thought her clever, too?"

"She delivered herself of some very neat lunges," he said with assumed indifference.

"Really? You goaded her, no doubt."

"Goaded her? My dear Princess, I would hardly do so crude a thing as 'goad' a woman. I wonder you can suggest it. I merely pricked her lightly, tickled her gently—very, very gently, I assure you."

"And she responded immediately?"

"As promptly as the bull responds when the bandillero plants the little tantalizing pennants of colored ribbon in his hide."

Sylvia's eyes narrowed. She was displeased. The *Hofmarschall*, without seeming to see, saw her displeasure.

"You said something malicious, I suppose?" she asked.

"On the contrary, I was very nice to her. I paid her a compliment."

"A compliment, I suppose, with a sting in it like a barbed wire fence."

"No, no. A real compliment. I complimented her upon her beauty."

Sylvia sighed wearily. In a perfunctory tone she said:

"You are a clever man, *Herr Hofmarschall*; court intrigues you understand to perfection. But of American women you know nothing—nothing."

Von Bardolph pretended to be piqued.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed.

"When an American girl possesses a quality that is very evident, either a physical attribute or a mental trait,

such as Miss Vaughn's beauty, she considers the man who compliments her upon it merely slow-witted and heavy."

"My dear, dear Princess, why this show of temper?"

"I wish you wouldn't 'dear' me quite so much, *Herr Hofmarschall*."

"*Zu Befehl, Hoheit.*"

The old man uttered the deferential little stock phrase signifying the speaker's abject submission to the mandates of royalty with a sarcastic flourish of manner that maddened Sylvia. She gave him a scornful, withering glance, and vouchsafed no reply.

The *Hofmarschall* reached for a chair.

"Have I your Highness's permission to sit?" he inquired.

"I always force you to stand in my presence, don't I, *Herr Hofmarschall*?" she asked contemptuously.

He seated himself, stretched his gouty leg, and regarded her quizzically.

"What are her morals?" he asked.

Sylvia flushed. She was very angry, and her anger blinded her to the manoeuvres of the clever old diplomatist.

"*Herr Hofmarschall*," she said haughtily, "the question is out of place. Miss Vaughn is here as my friend."

He arose and bowed. Then he sat down again.

"It is only fair to tell you," he said, "that I warned her against you."

"Very interesting."

"I told her that as an enemy you were implacable."

Sylvia shrugged her shoulders.

"It does not matter," she said. "She will not believe you, at any rate. She thinks no evil."

"Even if she commits it?"

Sylvia became furious.

"*Herr Hofmarschall*, for the third and last time, I insist that you do not make remarks of that sort about a friend of mine."

"Princess Sylvia," the old man's manner was almost a sneer, "you would not tell me what your little game is, but I have found it out! 'A face to change the map of empires!' You wish Ulrich to marry this girl to clear the way for Gunther, so that you may some day be queen. Do you really believe I will stand idly by and allow Ulrich to contract such a *mésalliance*? I am responsible for the conduct of this Court. Shall a scandal such as this marriage would make ring through Europe? This kingdom needs Prince Ulrich. He has been wildly extravagant. The State paid his debts twice over in anticipation of his services as Prince Regent, and the State has a right to hold him to the bargain. The old King will be dead within a year, and Ulrich, not Gunther, can restore this kingdom to prosperity and well-being. The Kingdom shall have its own. I shall spare no means, fair or foul, to gain my end. You are warned. Remove her, if you are really her friend. Unless she leaves Hohenhof-Hohe and that within a month's time, I will blast her reputation, and no matter how great Ulrich's infatuation for her is, even he will not think of marrying a woman who has been publicly branded as his mistress."

Sylvia was livid with rage. Before she could reply, the old man had hobbled away.

Von Garde took Alice in to dinner. The question of rank had been waived in distributing the guests at table, ostensibly at Sylvia's wish, and von Garde and the American sat at the same table with the royal princes. In spite of Alice's insufficient command of German, she perceived that this arrangement excited considerable

comment, and that it was generally taken for granted that she was the cause of it. Looks of saccharine, cloying sweetness greeted her on all sides, and she was treated by all to whom she was introduced with that singular, seemingly-honest cordiality which is the manner affected by the average, well-bred German, and although Alice was too astute to accept this warmth at face value, it was nevertheless very pleasant to have majestic dowagers in velvet and diamonds, and old generals with so many stars and orders pinned to their uniforms that the cloth was all but obscured, take evident pains to make themselves agreeable to her.

She was clever enough to know that it was the magic phrase "Princess Sylvia's friend," that caused this friendly flutter about her. She was not clever enough, however, to realize that behind a good many of those friendly faces lurked brains which had even now delved to the truth of the matter, and were, in talk among themselves, substituting the words "Prince Ulrich's new favorite" for "Princess Sylvia's friend."

She would not have been human if she had not enjoyed her success. Von Garde was delightful. He effaced himself completely and contented himself with drawing her out so that she might shine and scintillate more brightly. It was he, also, who introduced her to Baroness von Hess, who sat at his other side. Alice's neighbor at table was General von Ruegen, who, although introduced to her, ignored her completely. It was the first and only rebuff she met with through the evening, and it annoyed her unwarrantably. He was an old man, lithe and erect, and his hair and mustache were as white as snow, giving him a venerable, lovable appearance. Alice had singled him out early in the evening as one of the few persons whom she would care to

know more intimately. Now it appeared, from the mortifying politeness with which he treated her when forced to speak to her, that he would not care to know her more intimately.

General von Ruegen, was, in truth, an aristocrat of the old school, a man with inflexible notions of honor for men, and of virtue for women. His family was one of the noblest and oldest not only in the kingdom of Hohenhof-Hohe but in the whole of Germany. Of uncompromising probity himself, he exacted the same high plane of living from others. It was only necessary, as Gunther had disingenuously said, to look at Ulrich's eyes while contemplating Alice to read his infatuation and the old Excellenz quickly sized up the situation. This girl, charming and well-bred though she was, was in consequence no fit companion for his girls, two plain-looking, flaxen-haired maidens of eighteen and nineteen, and because he perceived how her beauty and wit had dazzled his Anna and his Marie, the old man treated Alice a shade more coldly perhaps, than he would have done had her superiority been less manifest.

Owing to the General's frigid manner, Alice was forced to speak exclusively with von Garde, as the table was too broad to allow of much cross-talking, and it was therefore impossible for her to ignore Baroness von Hess, as General von Ruegen was ignoring her, without appearing deliberately rude.

The Baroness's manner was absolutely conventional. She was entertaining and clever, if not witty, and extremely good-natured. Alice's first impression of her was strongly revived. She could not help but admire this clever, gracious woman of the world.

The three were soon chatting merrily. Alice stole furtive glances to the head of the table at times, to see

if Ulrich were watching the Baroness, or glancing at her, or observing her in any way, but he, coldly indifferent, looking marvellously bored, was punctiliously devoting himself to his neighbor.

The Baroness was shamefully neglecting her husband, who sat at her side. He, a wizened, insignificant-looking, faded old man, showed no resentment and gave himself up to enjoyment of the excellent dinner before him. Because of the Baron's poor physique and general repulsiveness, Alice concluded that the Baroness must have entertained an overwhelming passion, if not love, for Ulrich. In a sudden revulsion of feeling, she experienced a violent desire to rend and tear this woman, because she had enjoyed the caresses of her lover, and the cordiality and sweetness of the Baroness now seemed to her a well-laid trap of some sort, by means of which the man she loved was ultimately to be wrested from her. For a few miserable moments hatred tossed and surged in her. She dared not raise her eyes for fear that they mirrored what was written in her heart.

Then, ashamed of her vehemence, she endeavored to make tangible amends by increased amiability. A little episode helped matters along. While Alice was looking at Baron von Hess, quietly gormandizing at his wife's side, it occurred to her that such a man could not in the least appreciate his charming wife, and that she was scarcely to be blamed if her affections strayed. The disgust with which Baron von Hess infused her, became plainly visible in her face. He was eating voraciously. Alice, fascinated by his greediness, continued to gaze at him.

Suddenly she became aware that the Baroness was regarding her. Their eyes met. There was an amused

smile on the Baroness's face, while Alice blushed furiously.

The Baroness said:

"Your eyes are terribly eloquent, Miss Vaughn." She spoke past von Garde, who was prolix in his explanation to the waiter as to the kind of ice cream desired by the ladies, and who therefore did not hear her.

"Are they?" stammered Alice. Horribly mortified, she added quickly, "Sometimes eloquence is misleading."

The Baroness laughed as she replied:

"Not in this case, Miss Vaughn; you are quite right in your estimate. It is mine, too."

Then she laughed again, and Alice, seeing her lack of animosity, laughed also. When she looked up, she encountered Ulrich's eyes. He seemed vastly amused. He held her glance for a moment. Her eyes dropped first.

"Your eyes are terribly eloquent, Miss Vaughn," repeated the Baroness. Alice thought there was a bit of malice in her voice this time. She threw back her head defiantly, and met the other woman's gaze squarely.

The Baroness continued smoothly:

"This time it did not matter, Miss Vaughn, but some other wife might be less complacent."

Later, at three o'clock, Alice left the ballroom and went downstairs for her wraps. She entertained a vague sort of hope that Ulrich might be loitering about downstairs for a last word with her. She was disappointed. He was not there.

In the dressing room a number of ladies sat chatting as gaily as if it were three in the afternoon instead of three in the morning, and Alice heard someone say that Prince Ulrich had left much earlier than was his wont. She also encountered Baroness von Hess once more, who took occasion to say to her:

"Miss Vaughn, I hope that what I hear is true, that you will remain among us all winter. In a small, exclusive society like ours, you have no conception what a boon a new face is, particularly when that new face promises also to become a new personality and a new brain."

"You are very kind," said Alice, experiencing considerable uneasiness. "I intend remaining all winter."

"You Americans are an enviable people," said the Baroness, "independent means and independent character. A young woman of no other nationality, I venture to assert, would dare to live without a chaperone."

"I would hardly know what to do with a chaperone," smiled Alice.

"Nevertheless, later on you may find a chaperone quite convenient," was the Baroness's enigmatic retort. "Good—night, my dear."

What did it mean? Alice stood nonchalantly fastening her glove after the Baroness was gone. She could not find the key to this woman's character. Nor could she ask Sylvia any leading questions without betraying the real reason of her curiosity. Nor could she ask Ulrich. For some reason which she could not explain to herself, she did not wish Ulrich to suspect that she knew. . . .

As she entered the automobile which Sylvia had placed at her disposal for going home, she started back in sudden fright. The figure of a man was visible in the car.

"Don't be frightened; it is I——"

"Ulrich."

His arm had closed about her even before the door of the car had swung to.

"I could not go home, sweetheart, without taking you in my arms once, just once, to kiss you——"

His lips were voracious. His arms crushed her, until in pain from the violence with which his strong arms encircled her tender body, she begged for mercy.

He relinquished her almost immediately.

Dishevelled, her face burning from the roughness with which his lips had bruised it, her body aching from the impact of his arms, she sat back to collect herself.

He turned, and sitting sideways on the seat, faced her.

"Did you enjoy yourself?"

"Yes, I enjoyed myself ever so much more than I thought I would."

"You had quite a success."

"Everybody was delightful!"

"Everybody bowed to beauty which none can challenge."

Suddenly he had her in his arms again, and was whispering to her his love with a vehemence that was tempestuous. She tried to ward him off, but all his passion seemed to have gone to his lips and his mouth was travelling over her face, her eyes, her hair with a rapidity from which there was no escaping. She uttered a low cry, and fell back in his arms. His lips descended upon her bare shoulder, and showered kisses upon it . . .

"No, Ulrich, do be nice, dear; we shall be seen—the street is quite light still——"

Suddenly she felt giddy and ill. She really hoped he would desist. She had felt dizzy a few times during the evening, a few times the room had gone black before her eyes. She knew very well that malnutrition was the cause of her vertigo, and had barely touched the rich viands of the banquet, fearing they would make her ill.

Finally he drew away from her, but she could see from

the ecstatic light in his eyes that he had not even heard her admonition. He covered his face with his hand, and sat back in the softly padded seat. She could see that he was ashamed of his lack of restraint. She shivered; she drew her cloak about her shoulders and sat huddled together, numb with the cold resulting from fatigue.

He looked at her.

"How white you are, Alice! You are very tired, aren't you?" He spoke gently, affectionately.

"Yes, dear."

"Your 'cosy corner' is at your disposal."

She laughed.

"Don't you really mind? You're not too tired, yourself?"

"Mind!"

She crept into his arms, against his shoulder. To make her more comfortable, he put his arms about her, holding her firmly. She lay against his breast in delicious, drowsy languor. The warmth of his strong body was strangely gratifying.

"Are you quite comfy?" he murmured.

"Yes, dear."

But she did not fall asleep. She lay against his shoulder, watching his face. The look of ecstasy died away, and was succeeded by a look of quiet, determined patience. She had never seen this strange look in his face before. He had always struck her as a man who accomplished things by his brilliance, his initiative, his rapid and imaginative daring, but now in repose, not knowing that she was watching him, she saw an entirely different trait spring out upon his mobile face. She had the sensation that he had become a stranger. A singular craving seized her to hear his voice utter some familiar word of endearment.

Suddenly it occurred to her that in asking her whether she was "very tired" he had employed his usual delicacy to ascertain whether she would allow him to spend an hour with her before retiring to the *Neues Palais*, and she was quite certain that, perceiving her fatigue, he would not ask her the direct question for fear that she would acquiesce against her own inclination.

"What are you thinking of, Ulrich?"

He started.

"I thought you were asleep, sweetheart."

She raised her head from his shoulder and repeated her question.

"I was thinking, dearest," he said with a sort of passionate gentleness, "that it seems almost too good to be true—having you here as my own, my very own. Only one thing is lacking to make life quite perfect."

"What is that one thing, Ulrich?"

"That I must leave you again to-night, that I cannot breakfast with you in the morning, as I might do if you would allow me to give you your own establishment."

She became frightened. During the bitter moments of reflection earlier in the evening, she had practically concluded that she must yield this point also, for, persisting in her present course, she realized that she would either undermine her health, or lose him, or both. But she did not desire to yield the point just then. She did not wish him to suspect that her true reason for yielding the point was her horror of losing him. She meant to wait a week or so, and then, when the opportunity presented itself, gracefully recant.

A moment later she realized how needless her alarm had been. Whatever his faults, the instincts of the gentleman were too pronounced in him; he was too finely

bred to harass or distress any woman as weary and fatigued as she was, much less the woman he loved.

They rolled along in silence for several minutes.

"Ulrich, it was very nice of you to take me home."

He laughed shortly.

"Was it?" he said. "It wasn't wholly unselfish," he admitted. But although she waited, hoping he would particularize wherein his selfishness consisted, he said nothing more.

She kissed him. Pushing her away gently, he said:

"Alice, dear, don't kiss me again. I'm miserable enough as it is."

"Miserable?" she asked, pretending not to understand.

He became irritated.

"You know what I mean," he said brusquely. "I want so much to be with you."

"There is no reason why you shouldn't," she said, with throbbing temples.

"Do you mean—? No, it wouldn't be right of me. It is almost four now. You are wretchedly tired."

For the first time, strangely enough, she realized what inconvenience he was continually putting himself in order to safeguard her reputation.

"Alice, are you quite well? Lately, when you were asleep, or quiet, you seemed so exhausted, so utterly fagged out. You aren't continuing that absurd butter-milk diet, are you?"

"I stopped that long ago," she fibbed cheerfully.

The automobile slackened its pace. The chauffeur was trying to identify the house.

"You are coming up, aren't you?" she asked.

"If you're quite certain"—his eyes completed the sentence.

For the moment her weariness seemed to have van-

ished. With a quick, tremulous gesture of affection, she touched his brow with her ungloved hand.

"I want you to stay, Ulrich dear," she said. "Please come!"

"That's the first time, dearest, the first time you've admitted it."

Her cheeks turned crimson. His lips felt the sudden heat under the skin.

"My little Puritan," he whispered tenderly. "To blush because you allow me to see that you love me."

Upstairs he said in a disappointed voice:

"It's already a quarter past four."

She pushed open the door of the smaller room adjoining her sleeping room, which he used as a dressing room.

"Mercy, how cold it is in there!" she said. "I will leave the door open, so the room can warm up."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," he rejoined. "I don't mind the cold in the least, and your sleeping room will be chilled. It is not any too warm now. You know very well that you'll not sleep a wink if the room is cold."

But she would not close the door, and he, still with his coat and gloves on, went and closed it. She had already taken off the pearl necklace he had given her in Venice, and had removed her girdle. She turned to him:

"Unhook me, please."

"Sweetheart, I believe that is the real reason you allowed me to come up with you," he teased her gently. "You had no one to unhook you." He laid a kiss between her shoulders.

"I would have been in a fine predicament, wouldn't I? Thank you." And she ran off behind the screen, and began undressing. She stood toasting one pink foot against the fire when he came forth. She slipped her foot into her slipper and turned.

"Ulrich, dear," she went on, "if you don't mind, I should like to sit on your knee."

He drew her down upon his knee, and she placed her hands against his cheeks and said:

"Ulrich, do you believe any two other lovers have loved each other just the way we do?"

"Yes," he said, to tease her.

She frowned her disapproval.

"Then name them."

He remembered how, in a moment of fanciful ecstasy he had presumptuously told himself that his name and hers would ring down the grooves of history in company with the names of the classic lovers of the world.

"Hero and Leander," he said. She shrugged her shoulders disdainfully.

"Leander merely swam the Hellespont," she said. "I crossed the ocean."

"Romeo and Juliet," he suggested.

"Juliet was a poor, mean-spirited little coward. She didn't dare avow her love. And Romeo would never have remained true to her."

"Eloise and Abelard," he said hastily, feeling himself to be on thin ice.

She became serious.

"They sinned," she said. "And they spent the rest of their lives repenting of their sin, that means, thinking of their sin, and of each other."

She leaned her head against his, temple to temple.

"Eloise and Abelard," she said. "Ulrich and Alice— Ulrich, dear, I have lost my one slipper."

He stooped and recovered it, but before placing it upon her foot, he kissed her instep.

"What a pretty, pink little foot it is!" he said.

She did not reply, and when he turned to her, he saw

that her eyes had closed. He watched her a moment. She was lying limply in his embrace, looking very white and still. It occurred to him that she might have fainted. Then he realized that she had dropped asleep.

He became bewildered. He pulled over a chair to where he sat with his free arm, and rested his elbow upon it to relieve his arm of the weight of her body which was lying upon his muscles with the leaden heaviness of dead weight. She was ill. But what was the matter with her? The circles under her eyes were widening ominously. Her features, as her slumber deepened, became haggard and pinched. He remembered the words of the *Portier*:

"You are a fine fellow! You have enough to eat yourself, and allow your friend to starve." And that had been over two months ago!

A sudden fury possessed him. How foolish, how unnecessary for her to have suffered like this, if it was this, indeed. He meant to be certain of his premises, and he softly unbuttoned her night-dress. He touched her shoulders, searching for lax muscles, for flabby flesh.

"This is horrible," he said half-aloud. He was more shocked by his discovery than he had ever been. It seemed brutally preposterous that this frail, delicate girl had starved herself, been hungry day after day for months and months because she was too proud to accept a little miserable money from him. He could not credit the evidence of his own eyes. He was dazed.

She sneezed in her sleep, and fearing that she might take cold, he carried her to the bed. The covers were turned back, and he managed to slip her into bed without waking her. She tossed uneasily, and he heard her murmur his name. This caused a thrill of tenderness

to run through him so acutely that the tears came to his eyes.

He covered her, and kissed a braid of the glorious hair. He did not dare kiss her arm or her cheek for fear of waking her. Then stealthily, like a thief, he crossed to the bureau. He was determined now to learn all.

He opened the top drawer of her bureau, where he knew she kept her valuables, stopping to take the key from a little pocket in the rug where she invariably left it. In the drawers was the little box in which she kept her money and jewelry. It was open. Beside it lay her purse. He examined the purse first of all. The entire contents were a one-Mark piece, nor were there any bills or any coin in the box. The trinkets he had given her, were all there, but he immediately missed the pearl and turquoise set of her mother, which she had shown him one day, and finally he found the pawn-ticket for this. He shook his head in mute incomprehension.

"Good heavens!" he thought, "how she must love me to be willing to go through all this for me." But in the wake of this thought came the other, "How she must despise me to be unwilling to accept anything from me!"

Blinded by tears, humiliated, pained to a degree that he himself would not have believed possible, he put back the empty box and the lean purse, retaining only the pawn ticket. Then he sat down by the fire to think it all over.

Apparently there was only one thing to do. If she persisted in her refusal to make provision for her, he would have to marry her. And in spite of his intense love for her, he was as disinclined for marriage as he had ever been. And then there was Egon, and Hohenhof-

Hohe—and he had to do right by the boy and by the kingdom that had paid his debts twice over. The situation was horribly complicated. Still, if he could not prevail upon her to take a rational view of the situation, he would marry her. Even if he had desired to break with her in preference to marrying her, which he did not, it would have been out of the question for a man of honor to throw aside a woman who had carried her devotion so far. And if he married her, he would never reproach her or allow her to suspect that he regretted the step, for regret it he would. Of that, at least, he was wretchedly certain.

Suddenly an idea occurred to him. There was a way in which in all probability, he could force her to do what he wanted.

Alice tossed in her sleep. He remembered how light in the room bothered her when asleep, and he turned out the gas, lighting a candle, and placing it on a low footstool, where the light would not strike her eyes.

Taking a writing pad from his pocket, he sat down to write her a note. Suddenly his sense of humor awoke. It occurred to him how incredulous and disappointed all the good folk would be, who gloried in the black reputation of "*Unser Prinz Ulrich*," if they were told in what manner he was spending the small hours of the morning alone in the room with his mistress.

He wrote.

"DEAR ALICE:

"You will remember that you fell asleep while sitting on my knee." This brusque beginning would lead her to believe that he was displeased and irritated. That was well. It was time to show her that he was her master. "I have for some time suspected that you were not well.

As your physician, I insist upon your following the instructions contained in this letter. You will, on waking, ring for the janitress, whom I will instruct before leaving, to wait on you. These people know, at any rate, that I am your lover, so you can take no offence at my not consulting you prior to taking this step. You will eat the breakfast that I will have especially prepared for you. It will arrive at eleven, and you will also eat the light luncheon that I will send at two.

"I wish you to remain in bed until I come, which will be between three and four. We will then discuss the situation.

ULRICH."

He pinned this note to the counterpane at the foot of the bed, where she could not help but see it. Then, using every precaution against making a noise, he groped his way out of the room, and went downstairs. Rousing the *portier* and his wife, he gave the couple ample instructions, feeing them liberally.

This done he went out into the murky blackness of a German winter morning.

CHAPTER XIX

It was half-past ten when Alice awoke. She awoke with the sensation of having gone through an unexpected and unusual experience the night before, but she had slept heavily, and she could only hazily recall that she had been at a ball, and that Ulrich had come home with her.

She stretched her hand under her pillow for her watch, and when she realized that it was not there, she experienced a slight shock. Then she remembered that she had fallen asleep on Ulrich's knee, in his arms, while sitting before the fire. Poor Ulrich! He had been so ardent.

She sat up in bed, and luxuriously propped the pillows against her back. When had he left her? Why, in heaven's name, hadn't he awakened her?

Here she caught sight of the note that he had pinned to the counterpane. The sight of it set her heart throbbing. The sense of the unusual deepened. It took her a few minutes to find enough courage to read the letter, and having read it, strangely enough, she felt reassured. He was angry, that was evident, but she knew him too well by this time to suspect him of petty anger because she had fallen asleep prematurely. She was by no means obtuse, and on re-reading his letter, it gave her the impression of anger simulated rather than felt. He desired, she thought, to impress upon her, that he was very much displeased. With what?

Of course he had discovered that she had been starving herself. What did it matter, since she was about to

capitulate to him? She turned her head wearily, with a sigh.

No matter how fine the feeling was that bound her to him, she was not his wife, and consequently she was living in sin; she supposed, in refusing to accept money from him she had, after all, only been trying to cheat herself into the belief that she was not hopelessly, irreclaimably immoral. She wondered if he realized how keenly she felt this element. . . And yet she did not wish to lose the sense of guilt. She felt that if ever she fell into danger of becoming blunted as to that, she would force herself to repeat every night, "I am living an immoral life." It seemed to her, in holding fast to the sense of proportion of her wrongdoing, she was retaining a hold on the only bit of decent living and morality that ultimately might reclaim her, that could help her to keep her moral nature from crumbling into helpless ruin.

On the whole she was not afraid to meet Ulrich. He would show a good deal of temper, probably, but she knew the efficacy of her kisses, and she was quite sure that when he felt her soft, warm arms about his neck, he would forgive her.

Nevertheless, his letter had awed her, and when her breakfast arrived, she drank the orange juice, and ate the deliciously thin buttered toast, and the poached eggs, all of which she enjoyed—and the porridge as well, which she detested. But she did not dare disobey him. His note had been too peremptory.

He came at three, and even before he entered, she knew he was still angry by his step. She became frightened, and could hardly call out "Come in," when he rapped.

"How are you to-day?" he asked.

"I'm feeling very well," she said.

"Hm!" He had taken off his overcoat, and stood drawing off his gloves, the picture of professional aloofness. She made a desperate effort at playfulness.

"I enjoyed my breakfast and my lunch very much. If you treat as well all your patients who are not ill at all, but whom you fancy ill, you must be very popular."

"You forget," he said coldly, "I have no practice, strictly speaking."

Her heart began to beat, her pulses to leap.

"Ulrich," she said, in desperation, and there was a quiver in her voice, "aren't you going to kiss me?"

He ignored the question.

"The air is bad in here," he said, and opened a window. Then he found her a shawl, and deftly threw it about her shoulders without touching her.

"I should like to look at your tongue."

Obediently she showed it.

He took out his mouth thermometer and washed it.

"Ulrich, dear, I'm not feverish—really, it's absurd——"

"If you please, Alice." The tone was final. Tears stood in her eyes, but she obeyed him.

"Temperature is normal," he said, still speaking in the cold, detached, professional voice.

He sat down on a chair close beside her bed, and took a stethoscope from his pocket.

"I should like to examine your lungs," he said. "Kindly open your night-gown."

Her fingers trembled so violently, as she tried to undo the button, that she could not pull it out of the buttonhole. To her mortification he was forced to help her.

"Lungs are all right," he announced, and stretched out his fingers to feel her pulse, but he had held her

wrist in his cool fingers only a few seconds, when he withdrew his hand, saying gently:

"Why are you so agitated, Alice?"

Her tears overflowed and began to fall.

"Ulrich, dear, why are you so cross with me?"

Instead of replying, he arose, and got a small parcel from his overcoat pocket. This he placed on her bed. She moved her feet under the bed covering to make room for it. He cut the string, and undid the paper. The turquoise and pearl set which she had pawned fell out.

"How dared you rummage through my drawers?" she said, feigning an anger and a defiance which she was far from feeling. "You had no right to."

"Yes—I had a right to—the right of the man who loves you and whom you profess to love." He spoke in a simple, convincing way.

He pushed the jewelry toward her.

"How could you do such a thing, Alice?" he asked. "I confess, I am at a loss to understand you. At times you pretend to feel an unbounded, an illimitable devotion for me. At other times you drop remarks that lead me to think you regard our love as a vulgar *amour*, and sometimes it seems to me that you think the only feeling that binds me to you is my passion. You seem to think that if you placed yourself under what it pleases you to term 'financial obligations' to me, it would lower you in my eyes to the level of a common courtesan. How then could you, feeling as you do, pawn this jewelry—your father's wedding gift to your mother—for the sake of perpetuating or continuing a low intrigue?"

She did not reply, but a hard, dry sob came from her throat. Her eyes were large, frightened-looking and lustrous. Two red spots showed on either cheek and

warned him not to deal too harshly with her. She was not in condition to be frightened into hysterics.

"Don't be so angry, Ulrich, dear," she begged again.

"I am not angry, Alice. I am deeply hurt. You know as well as I do that you committed an inexcusably wicked folly in starving yourself as you have been doing. You realize, don't you, dear, that if you had taken any infection while weakened by innutrition, you would not have been able to fight the sickness?"

"That never occurred to me, Ulrich."

He sat back in his chair and contemplated her gravely. He had not yet kissed her, and her cheek, her shoulders, her arms were aching for the impact of his embrace. But he had no thought, at the moment, of caressing her. All he had said so far was inspired by genuine feeling and affection. He had been sincere. There had not been a spurious note in his words. But now, assured that no illness was impending, there leapt into the foreground of his mind the desire to immediately enter the devious paths of the comedy which was to compel her acquiescence in financial dependence. He was anxious to settle the matter once and for all. If it would be necessary for him to submit to the hated yoke of marriage, why, submit he must.

He opened fire circumspectly. He was cruelly astute, and what rendered him so dangerous an adversary was his ability to present each kernel of falsehood or insincerity or sophistry that happened to serve his purpose at the moment in company with so much sincerity and honesty and candor, that the iniquitous kernel was absorbed, together with its self-respecting neighbors, before its true nature was perceived, much as a child will swallow a bitter pill imbedded in a spoonful of jelly without noticing the unsavory, hard nucleus.

"Alice," he said, "I have done some hard thinking after leaving you last night, this morning I should say. I am sorry to have to say all this to you, but we must have it over. It is, of course, out of the question, that things shall continue as heretofore. As you seem determined to maintain your financial independence, only one way remains open for us. I have no right to ruin your life, your health, your future. Your reputation remains unblemished, and I feel that for your sake certainly, and for my own also, before I grow to be still fonder of you, it is well to separate now."

He had not the hardihood to look at her as he spoke. He fully expected a vigorous remonstrance, a pitiful, tearful sob, perhaps—possibly hysterics. At the least he thought she would say in a heart-broken voice, "I am not the woman to cling to you if you are tired of me." That would have given him a chance for increased diffidence of manner, and eloquent disavowal in words of his desire to break with her. All that, he had calculated, would bring her to her knees. And having nerved himself for this theatrical *coup*, it was disconcerting to have her remain calm, even disaffected.

Alice knew him better than he suspected, by this time; she had developed and matured; her horizon had widened, and his strategies, once so effective and unanalyzed, were now, as a rule, more or less fluent reading. Moreover, she was fully convinced of his deep love for her, and last of all, had she not decided the night before to yield this point also?

She said, "Go on."

"I have told you what I think," he replied. "I would like your answer."

"One can reply only to questions. You have asked me none."

He bit his lip and frowned, and she continued:

"Do you want my opinion?"

"Yes," he said unevenly. Apart from the fact that defeat would be humiliating, it would precipitate him into marriage which he wished to avoid.

Alice was regarding him with an amused little air.

"Do you know, Ulrich," she said pleasantly, "if I were less convinced of your love, I should think you were choosing a graceful way of letting me know that you were tired of me. However, I am convinced that I am quite as indispensable to your happiness as you are to mine. Then why this ridiculous little lecture that you have just preached to me? I'll do as you wish about an income, or an allowance, and an establishment or anything else, of course."

That "of course" tucked neatly at the end of her surrender stung him into silent fury. He made a brave effort to control his temper. It certainly was exasperating to have her add this "of course" so diffidently, when he remembered her frequently iterated angry, hot-blooded assertions of "never."

"You won't regret it?" he asked unsteadily.

His victory had come to him so easily that he suspected it was, strictly speaking, no victory at all, merely a conjunction of circumstance and mood, and the terrific expenditure of energy in scheming and laying his snare for her now appeared utterly absurd. That stung him, too.

"You won't regret it?" he asked again.

"If I do," she replied with a droll smile, "I will not let you see it. And that, I think, is all that can be of interest to you."

She had spoken without bitterness, meaning to be playful, but, after all, she did not know her lover quite

as well as she supposed. There was in his nature, under the facile worldliness and cynicism which became him so well, a substratum of fineness and delicacy of perception which she had not fathomed. Also, for the first time in his self-willed, self-indulgent existence, he cared sufficiently for someone to be seriously hurt by an unflattering estimate of himself.

He turned very pale. Like all strong natures, he became angry when hurt. She could see that he was in one of his Berserker rages, but she did not guess the extent of his anger, for he averted his eyes. He walked away from her, fearing to say some irreparable thing in the first heat of anger. It flashed upon him that, for the first time, it was comprehensible to him how a man, in a fit of fury, can lay the whip across the shoulders of the woman he loves. With his back to her, standing at the foot end of the bed, he strove for mastery of himself.

"Ulrich!" she called. "Ulrich!" But he did not turn.

She threw back the covers, and kneeling on the bed, caught him by the sleeve. She wound one soft arm about his, and placed the other hand on his shoulder.

"Ulrich, dear."

He came one step nearer.

"Lie down," he said in an unnatural, choked-up voice. "The window is open right back of you. You will take cold if you uncover yourself like that."

Gently he forced her back into bed, and covered the woman whom a moment before he had believed himself capable of chastising.

She made room for him to sit on the edge of the bed, but he resisted her, as she tried to pull him down, and stood before her, scarcely less forbidding than before. Her heart sank within her.

"Why do you despise me so?" he blurted forth at last.

"Dearest, I don't despise you."

She realized that she had excoriated him, though she did not know how. She felt abashed. Until now she had always considered herself finer fibred than he, but here she was unable to comprehend why he was taking the whole matter so absurdly to heart.

Following a sudden impulse, she stooped down and kissed his hand. He wrenched it away from her.

"No, Alice, no, it is my place to kiss your hand, not your place to kiss mine."

He sat down on the bed beside her. She noticed how haggard and tired he looked. She had a poignant sensation that some day he would be old, and she also, but she would love him as much as now, perhaps more.

"Alice, you don't really believe that if you are distressed it matters nothing to me?"

"Of course not."

"Why did you say it, then?"

"Goodness, Ulrich—sheer deviltry. I've said worse things to you before, haven't I?"

"Possibly, but I hadn't then been through what I went through last night."

All his pent-up passion and distress rose in a sudden attack of emotion. His breath became labored. His frame was shaken, as with sobs. His self-control was gone.

Alice averted her eyes. It did not seem right to her that she should see him thus shaken and unhinged. She wanted to help him, but she could think of nothing to say or do. She felt that she would like to kiss him, and soothe him, but a caress seemed trivial at such a moment. He appeared sacred to her because of the soul which he

had so suddenly revealed. The tension became insupportable. She sought refuge as usual in playfulness.

"Ulrich, dear, may I get up after a while? Or must I remain in bed, like a naughty child that has been spanked?"

He gave her a wistful, tender, gentle smile.

"My little Puritan," he said softly.

His arms opened, and quite naturally she crept into them, and lay against his heart, eyes closed. What unspeakable bliss it was, to feel his arms about her again!

He bent over her, and whispered in her ear:

"Heaven?"

"No, Ulrich, just plain, ordinary, every-day home."

Their lips met. Their blood surged in their ears, roared in their temples. For a moment, she endured his mouth—then her lips parted. Still his mouth lingered—without kissing—lingered.

CHAPTER XX

On the night of the ball, before retiring, the *Hofmarschall* sought out the King. The King suffered from insomnia, and he found that a chat at midnight, or later, particularly if flavored with a little scandal, was conducive to sleep. The Master of the Ceremonies entered the Royal apartment on tiptoe, unannounced, so that, if the aged potentate was asleep, he could withdraw without disturbing him. But His Majesty was awake, and called out to him to come in.

Von Bardolph was particularly anxious to speak to the King that night. It was far from his intention to acquaint his sovereign, for whom he entertained a very sincere and loyal devotion, with the scandalous state of affairs which he had discovered, and with the infamy into which one of his grandchildren was trying to drag the other. Resourceful, crafty, unhampered by squeamishness of conscience, the *Hofmarschall* felt himself to be quite capable of coping with the situation, and by saying a few pretty things about "the fair American" that very evening to King Egon, he hoped to protect himself against suspicion, should Sylvia, driven to desperation, turn tale-bearer.

"*Excellenz*, is it you?" asked the King.

"Yes, your Majesty."

"I have been awake for an hour, Wilhelm," said the monarch. In private these two addressed each other as in their college days, without formality or ceremony; "I

was sure you would have something to tell me, and so I tried to keep awake. Well?"

"You still have something to live for," responded the *Hofmarschall*, "the pleasure to be derived from looking at this new importation of Ulrich's is worth a year of gout."

"And at your age, Wilhelm?" said the King tauntingly.

"My pleasure was purely æsthetic. No, that is not true."

"Now for a shameless confession," smiled the old King banteringly.

The *Hofmarschall* continued:

"It was not purely æsthetic, because it was partially mental. The young lady is not only the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, but is capable of delivering as stinging a repartee as you yourself might have desired, in your prime."

"I must have her here," exclaimed the King eagerly. "As soon as I may use my eyes a little, I must have her here."

"I have been thinking," said the *Hofmarschall* pensively, "that it is well for the honor of your house that the late lamented Joachim, your brother, is no longer alive."

"Why?"

"Seeing her, I think he would have assassinated Ulrich," said von Bardolph quietly.

The King guffawed. "I hope," he said, "that you do not compare Ulrich and that godless old libertine, Joachim. But to be frank with you, Wilhelm, you seem a bit smitten yourself."

"Alas, no," retorted Excellenz, "but I shall sedulously pretend to be. At my age the blood no longer responds to the call of the æsthetic sense, but memory remains,

and the æsthetic sense being stimulated and tickled, we old men, out of vanity, must simulate an infatuation which we are no longer capable of experiencing."

A few days later, Alice was summoned to appear before the King. The introduction had been postponed again and again, because of His Majesty's poor health and failing eyesight. It was an informal morning audience, and it was Princess Sylvia who presented the American, much to the mortification of von Bardolph, who had hoped to deliver some barbed sentence along with the introduction that would prick and stick like a burr.

The King, standing in the embrasure of one of the tall, curtained windows, regarded Alice earnestly.

"Ah," he said at last, "the *Hofmarschall* did not warn me sufficiently. My physician, you must know, cautioned me against looking at the sun or at anything of like radiance."

"Your Majesty should remember," Alice rejoined, "that such a similar radiance may be akin to the poor radiance of the moon, shining merely with a light reflected by the sun of this country, your own kind heart."

"You are charming, my dear," exclaimed the King, paternally patting her shoulder, and he bade her come and see him often, unless indeed, it would be too much of a bore for her to sit an hour or so occasionally with a lonely, sick old man.

And so it happened that many a morning after that, Alice sat at the side of the huge arm-chair of the King, or at his bedside, on such mornings when he was too ill to leave his bed. She had dreaded this audience. She found, in his own words, a sick, lonely, old man, and there was something infinitely pathetic to her in the figure of the half-blind, slowly dying monarch, sur-

rounded by every luxury that money could buy, by every deference and civility that his rank could impose.

Some mornings he spoke about himself, his life, his youth. He had been anxious to travel, he said, but in his day Court etiquette had hedged about a prince more rigidly than now. He envied Ulrich his opportunity of visiting the great, wonderful country beyond the sea. He envied Ulrich other things as well. He did not specify what these "other things" were, but he looked at Alice as keenly as his poor, rheumy, bleary eyes would permit him to do. And the girl, seeing that look of penetration, half believed that he suspected the truth.

Other mornings she read to him. He was a fairly good English scholar, and he loved Shakespeare, and it was from the immortal pages of "Hamlet" or "Midsummer Night's Dream" that he bade her read oftenest.

Ulrich was looking about meanwhile for her "establishment." Alice, in all simplicity, had imagined he would furnish some comfortable elevator apartment of six or seven rooms for her, but when she mentioned a very attractive apartment house in the *Grosse Opernstrasse* Ulrich looked at her in such evident and disapproving amazement that, chagrined, she felt she had at last said the impossibly blatant and crude thing.

Nothing less than a "villa" would do her, it seemed, a villa being the equivalent or nearly so for the English "cottage" in so far as that much-abused word is used to denote three-story mansions with colonnaded fronts, built of sandstone or granite or marble. It was not an easy matter, however, to find a suitable "villa." Some were too small, some too large, some too far from the *Neues Palais*, others too near the heart of the city. There was one villa which would have suited them both, although its grounds were so spacious, so magnificent its equipment

and exterior that Alice had no notion that Ulrich would rent it. He became cross whenever they passed it.

"Confound it," he would say, "Banker Seligmann can afford that sort of a mansion for each of his eight daughters—the youngest one receives this palace as part of her dower—and I cannot get you anything nearly as nice."

Alice soothed him:

"Love is content with a crust in a hut," she said.

He quoted maliciously:

"Love in a hut with water and a crust,
Is, love forgive me, cinders, ashes, dust."

"Would you have loved me less, Ulrich," she said, in a woebegone way, "if we were a poor, young couple, who had to do without sugar and butter to make two ends meet?"

"I don't think I would have minded the sugar and butter," he said dryly, "but, oh, what can life mean without a valet to prepare one's bath, and without one's especial blend of cigarettes?"

"I have never had a maid to prepare my bath," said Alice humbly.

"You shall have one very soon, my dear, and you will find what a zest it adds to life not to have to think of the wearisome details of living."

Alice said nothing. A sudden wave of recollection came rolling over her, submerged her. She remembered that first luncheon with him in New York. It seemed to her that she had grown many years older since that day, and yet barely six months had elapsed. If anyone had then prophesied that she would consent to a *liaison* with this dashing foreigner, leave her friends, her work, her future—everything, in fact, for his sake, she would have accused him of lunacy.

When Ulrich came that evening, he handed her a large box of bonbons. She thanked him, somewhat surprised that he brought her such a quantity of sweets, of which he did not approve. She did not open the package at once, and he said to her:

"Won't you open the candy?"

She untied it. A bankbook lay at the top of the box. Opening it, she gave a little gasp of surprise. He had deposited a quarter of a million of marks in her name.

"Ulrich, dear, I thank you, of course, but it is, it is——" She stopped, fearing to relapse into maudlin blatancy.

He was standing two feet away from her in the courtliest of attitudes.

"You didn't suppose," he said gently, "that I would humiliate you by asking you to accept trifling amounts, piecemeal, did you? We will have to discuss this money matter at some time, so supposing we go at it now and get through with it. The amount deposited in your name will last you for the defraying of clothes, servants' wages, butchers' and grocers' bills, incidentals and personal expenses, for approximately a year. The rental I will pay in bulk, as soon as we have found a proper location. Before the funds are exhausted, a new deposit will be made. All this will be attended to automatically. You need not worry about overdrawing the account. Use as much as you please, dear; spend money foolishly; nothing would please me better. That's all."

With the bankbook in her hand, she crossed to him, and sat down beside him on the couch.

"A quarter of a million marks, Ulrich," she said in a bewildered, awed way. "That's fifty-six thousand dollars. And you expect me to spend that in a year?"

He laughed.

"I expect, my dear," he said, "that by and by you will be complaining of the beggarly pittance that I allow you."

She shook her head quite seriously.

"I do not know how to thank you, Ulrich," she said. "Of course I knew you were going to treat me liberally, but I didn't anticipate you would be quite so generous."

After she had spoken, it seemed to her that her words were stilted and ill-chosen, and that they must appear cold and unappreciative to him. She should at least say something about his delicacy. But try as she would, she could not find the right words. Eyes averted, she sat beside him in helpless dejection, hoping he would come to her rescue in some way. And to add to her misery, she remembered that one of Balzac's *Ducs* brought his mistress her quarterly allowance in a bag of sweetmeats. If Ulrich had plagiarized, he had done so unconsciously; but his delicacy now seemed specious and over-subtle. Had she been his wife, would he have given her the book in just that way?

She heard him laugh, and it brought her back to the situation with a start.

"How unhappy we look!" he said coaxingly. "Is it so very dreadful to be asked to spend fifty-six thousand dollars a year just as you please?"

He encircled her with his arms. Glad to escape from the scrutiny of his eyes, she sought her usual refuge on his shoulder.

"You're going to be sensible, dearest, aren't you?" he asked anxiously. "I want you to be just riotously extravagant, a new bonnet every day, a new gown for every third day in the week. Nothing would give me more pleasure than if you were to send me extra bills from dressmaker and milliner. If you do not spend at

least fifty thousand marks within a month, I shall be deeply hurt."

If she had looked at his face, she would have seen that he was teasing her. But her face was hidden against his shoulder, and she walked beautifully into the trap.

"Fifty thousand marks a month would be out of all proportion, Ulrich dear," she said naively, "if the quarter of a million is to last a year."

"Is to last a year?" His merriment was catching. "If the beggarly pittance is to last a year! My prophecy has come true even now."

He was laughing joyously, boyishly.

"Ulrich dear, you are so silly." She looked at him adoringly. "Dearest, dearest, I think you are quite the nicest creature that God ever made."

With mock gravity he remonstrated.

"Oh, foolish little maiden! Where is the wisdom of Balzac, of Maupassant, of Daudet? Have the words of the three sages most deeply versed in love profited you nothing? Will you insist upon boring to death him whom your charm has lured, by meaningless iteration of 'I love you?'"

"Yes, I will," she said mischievously, with pretty defiance. "I'll say it as often as I please. I will, I will."

Early the next morning Ulrich telephoned her. He had just heard at the Clinic of a very large and commodious apartment, occupying two floors, which the lessee desired to sub-let for six months. Would she go and look at it at once? He, of course, could not appear in the transaction at all, nor could he go to look at the rooms, and he cautioned her about pantry, kitchen, servants' chambers and reception room to such an extent that she felt this to be the most monumental undertaking on which she had ever embarked.

Ulrich came early in the afternoon.

"Well?" he asked eagerly. "Will the apartment do?"

Alice sat regarding him apparently lost in deep meditation. She was brimful of mischief. Moreover, she had thoroughly enjoyed her morning. It had been quite delightful to motor up to the swell hotel, for Ulrich had sent her an automobile, and to have one flunkey open the automobile door and another swing open the hotel gate for her, to be ushered into marvellously beautiful rooms wondrously furnished and to play the wealthy woman of the world in conversing with the *Frau Kommerzienrath* who had offered her gorgeous rooms to a six months' lessee—kitchen utensils, Art Nouveau furniture, Limoges china, Sevres vases and all.

"Of course," the lady had said apologetically, "we would have to ask some sort of reference of you, as we are leaving our art treasures here with you."

"Naturally." Alice handed her card to the *Frau Kommerzienrath*. "I can refer you to Princess Sylvia—you had better address Frau von Schwellenberg in writing."

Upon hearing those magic words, "Princess Sylvia," the excellent *Frau Kommerzienrath*, aristocratic soul that she was, had almost kow-towed to Alice.

"If I had understood your name," she assured her, "I would never have asked to be referred to anyone. Everybody knows you are a friend of the Princess."

All this had vastly amused the girl, and the copious flow of information with which the lady of the house had regaled her after this little episode, had opened her eyes to a good many contingencies of housekeeping and living on the magnificent scale which would now be required of her, of which she had not dreamed a half hour before.

She was prepared, at any rate, to amuse herself at Ul-

rich's cost. Seemingly sedate and grave and conscientious, she was fairly overflowing with mischievousness.

"There are," she said, "fourteen rooms, besides kitchen and three baths. And the servants' chambers. I think the apartment *may do* as well as any other."

"*May do?*" he asked a bit impatiently. "Why *may do*? Are the rooms not desirable? They were represented to me as particularly attractive."

Alice turned up her nose.

"The music-room and library open on an air shaft," she said tolerantly. "Of course the air shaft is big."

Ulrich was nonplussed.

"It must be big," he said, "it's more of a court-yard than an air shaft. I understand they have palms and rubber plants, big ones, and ferns and all sorts of green stuff there from spring right through into winter."

"Yes, I believe I did see a few potted plants," said Alice diffidently. The color mounted to his cheeks, and his companion all but betrayed herself.

"The servants' quarters are the real problem," she continued, swallowing her mirth at Ulrich's discomfiture. "They will hold only six servants comfortably, although the present tenant says one can manage to squeeze eight persons into them."

Ulrich leaned back and folded his arms in hopeless bewilderment.

"And pray," he said, "how many servants had you intended retaining in an apartment?"

Alice's gravity almost collapsed like a pricked balloon beneath that awful gaze of stern disapproval of her sudden sumptuary desires.

"I don't see, dear," she said in the insincerest of tones, the tone which an injured wife is expected to expostulate in, "how I can do with less than ten."

Ulrich heaved a sigh of relief mixed with incredulity.

"You are learning rapidly, Alice," he said, not wholly pleased. "How do you make it ten?"

"Ten and my maid. The maid, of course, sleeps on the bedroom floor with me, so as to be within beck and call."

"Yes, of course, but the other ten?" His patience was wearing thin.

"The cook, the cook's helper, the dishwasher and cleaner, parlor-maid, chamber-maid, coachman, groom and three lackeys," said Alice triumphantly. "And then, of course, an extra room for the chauffeur."

"Three lackeys in an apartment?" The comic horror expressed in Ulrich's face was good to behold. "Seligmann's daughter in her villa of thirty-six rooms will not have more than four."

Alice's mirth would be suppressed no longer.

With a serpentine twist of her lithe body, she seated herself on his knee.

"You sweet, dear, big stupid goose," she said, and began humming the tune, "I was teasing, teasing, I was only teasing you."

He looked at her wearily.

She took his head in her arms, and crushed his face against her bosom until he was almost suffocated.

"Alice, what is the matter with you? Will you kindly answer a sensible question like a sane person?"

Another serpentine twist of her agile, graceful form, and she was sitting in the furthest corner of the settee.

"I am quite sane now," she announced. "What is it you wish to know?"

The sense of her beauty, the soft, sweet sensation her strong young arms had left upon his cheek suddenly went to his head.

"I love you, I love you," he stammered incoherently.

"And I love you, dear," she said placidly, kissing his brow. "The apartment is charming, ideal. We couldn't find a finer one. The reception rooms are large enough for a small affair. For larger receptions, more than a hundred persons, *Frau Kommerzienrath* tells me all the tenants use one of the private ballrooms attached to the house."

"Then you will take it?"

"Yes, if the rental isn't too high. Besides, they insist on my—our taking it for six months. What will we do if you find a suitable house in the meantime? I really think the apartment is so suitable that we shall not need to find a house."

"You must leave that to me, Alice."

"I know, dear, I do leave it to you, of course. I was thinking of the expense. This apartment will cost you quite enough. A house with a larger retinue of servants will cost you a frightful sum."

"The expense is my affair, not yours."

"Very well," she said meekly.

"Look here, Alice, you're not going to reopen that subject, are you?"

"Ulrich dear, you are so unreasonable. You didn't like it one little bit, did you, a minute ago, when I pretended to want an army of lackeys?"

"My dear child," he said weakly, "I was surprised, amazed—you didn't seem yourself when you began putting on such airs. Besides, it is much better for you to break yourself in with a moderate-sized *menage*, with six or seven servants, before tackling a bigger undertaking."

"I have a lot to learn," she said tentatively.

"You have, but you are clever, and have a marvellous

capacity for assimilation. You will learn all there is to know in a few months' time."

"But what shall we do, Ulrich, if you find a house in the meantime, before the six months are up?"

He laughed gaily.

"What a little simpleton you are!" he said. "I shall consider ourselves very lucky if we manage to find a suitable villa and contrive to get it furnished, all in six months."

Her next sentence left him breathless with astonishment, brought it home to him forcibly that after all, she was very young.

"Ulrich dearest, there is one thing I want so badly—please say I may have it, and don't laugh at me. I want the lackeys to have liveries of red plush all laced with gold braid. May I? Please say 'yes.' Be nice."

Ulrich could not suppress his amusement.

"Good Lord, child, where did you get that notion?"

"Oh, Ulrich, I just love the plush liveries the lackeys wear at the *Koenigliches Palais*."

"But those are yellow, not red."

"Where's the difference?"

"Surely you're not color-blind, Alice?"

"Then I can't have the red plush liveries?"

He took her hand and pressed it. He did not wish to spoil her pleasure by brutally criticizing any little plan, no matter how foolish, which she might have made.

"Dear little girl," he said tenderly, "it is your *menage*, and you may buy, and arrange, and furnish as you please."

"But I want your advice, Ulrich."

"Well, then, as you are an American, a rich American, as you will please remember, who has been accustomed to luxury and high living all her life, would it not be more

natural for you to dress your servants in the style to which you have been accustomed always, and which, of course, is American, not European? A dark green or dark blue livery would be more in keeping with your character, wouldn't it?"

"How clever you are, Ulrich!" she said admiringly. She looked at him a little enviously. "I wish I had thought of that point. It's a very good one. Yes, by all means, dark green, bottle-green liveries. And here is something you haven't thought of."

The graceful curves of her body once more had relaxed, contracted, leaving her, inexplicably propelled, upon his knee.

"I think so much better when I'm on your knee," she said demurely, kittenishly.

"And pray, how does sitting on my knee facilitate your mental process?" he asked sardonically.

"Brings me into closer contact with your august mentality," was her laconic reply. "Magnetic current from you to me."

"What's the point you thought of?"

"Strictly speaking, you folks over here, Ulrich, have no butlers. Now I'm going to have a butler, a real English butler, such as you read about in books, and I'm going to get him from London just as soon as you can lay hands on him."

"The very thing," cried Ulrich enthusiastically. "There's the Duke of Gilvarney. He's going to Africa, lion-hunting. His butler has been with him for years, and as the Duke is breaking up his establishment, we may be able to get him."

"Is the Duke a friend of yours?" asked Alice.

"Yes, dear, a very good friend. Blinkins is the man for you. I'll write Gilvarney to-morrow."

"Is the Duke a—a—respectable person, Ulrich?"

"My dear girl, what a question—of course he's respectable."

She looked at him with large, wide-open eyes. He read the question in them which she had not the courage to frame in words.

"Oh, as to that, of course Blinkins will come—if he's paid enough. Alice dear, you will have to quit worrying on that score."

"I'm not worrying on that score, or on any other. I'm enjoying myself immensely. I'm going to like being rich, Ulrich."

"Of course you are."

"And it's so much more picturesque than being poor. I've been thinking things over, Ulrich. If there's only a little money, it is manifestly the woman's duty to make the most of it. So, conversely, it must be her duty to make the most of much money. That's what I'm going to do."

He kissed her passionately. But she did not tell him, as he caressed and crushed her, that her envisagement of the new world into whose maze she had wandered had taught her the priceless bit of worldly wisdom that while a man may forgive the woman who cannot live down to small means, he will unconditionally despise the woman who cannot live up to a big income.

So Blinkins was sent for, servants were engaged, the apartment taken possession of, the bottle-green liveries ordered. But before Alice had had a chance to enjoy all her new grandeur, something had occurred that put the exigencies of wealth out of her mind.

There had been a frightful accident in a coal-mine, and every available nurse and physician was rushed to the spot. Ulrich went as a matter of course, both in

his capacity of physician and as the personal representative of the King. Alice begged and implored him to be allowed to go. She expected a refusal; to her surprise he acquiesced almost immediately.

She had loved him before, but seeing his tenderness, his patience, his endurance under great bodily fatigue as he moved about among the dead and the maimed, there came moments to her when her pride in him became so rampant that she thought she must stand up and cry out loud, "That man whom you all love because of his goodness and efficiency is mine, mine, mine!" And even the misery and suffering which she witnessed could not dampen her spirits. Is there not some subtle virtue in love, some balsam from the spiritual world, that makes the heart that harbors it impervious to the ills of the world?

Nor did Alice spare herself. Ulrich, who had looked upon her as a fragile human blossom, marvelled at her physical stamina and steady nerves.

They returned—separately—in a fortnight. Alice, utterly exhausted, remained in bed for forty-eight hours, of which she slept thirty-six. The next morning she dressed herself with the utmost care, intending to present herself in the King's anteroom. She had not yet finished her breakfast of chocolate and rolls, when her maid announced the *Hofmarschall*.

Alice received him with conflicting emotions. It was apparent that he desired to appear very friendly, but the malice which informed him would out; cupidity and slyness were in his eyes, and the girl, regarding him, felt an intense hatred for this man sweep over her, a hatred so fierce that it amounted almost to physical loathing. He stood before her in an attitude of utmost deference.

"I have the honor," he said, "to be sent to you as mes-

senger of his gracious majesty, King Egon. In recognition of your admirable service during the past fortnight, the King desires to bestow upon you the title of Countess of Gortza, which has recently fallen vacant through the death of the last incumbent. The title carries with it a moderate income, about five thousand marks a year. His majesty desires you to present yourself at eleven this morning for an audience, when it will be his pleasure to formally bestow and confirm the title."

The little man paused for a moment, then continued smoothly, "I trust I may be the first to salute you as Countess of Gortza, as I shall virtually be the last person to call you by your present name, Miss Vaughn." He bowed profoundly, then advanced, kissing her finger-tips.

Alice was surprised at her own fluency and composure in making her acknowledgment. When she had finished, the *Hofmarschall* said:

"It is only fair to apprise you, Miss Vaughn, that the suggestion to give you this patent of nobility emanated from Prince Ulrich. So at least I inferred as I was called to the King's chamber immediately after the Prince had left him."

Alice, believing silence to be best, said nothing. The *Hofmarschall* concluded:

"You yourself will know in what way his Highness will prefer to have you indemnify him for this kindness."

The words were as nearly a sneer as words can be. Alice pretended to misunderstand this innuendo.

"I shall certainly express my appreciation of his kindness to the Prince," she said. "I am greatly pleased to think my poor services were sufficiently valuable to deserve his gracious attention and comment."

It was only after the "odious little animal" was gone, that the full import of his visit dawned upon Alice.

Countess von Gortza! For what? For nursing some wounded and mangled men. Other nurses had done the same, yet none but herself, she knew, would receive a title in return for her services. Frau von Schwellenberg's prophecy had come true.

She grew hot and cold in quick alternation. How could Ulrich do this thing? He must have known that it would make her disastrously conspicuous. But she had no time to waste in idle meditation, and as she hurriedly slipped into her coat and furs, a little sense of elation came over her. After all, it was a fine thing to receive a title, though she was the daughter of a Republic, and she could not help feeling delighted at being summoned to the King to be invested with her new honor. Suddenly it occurred to her that as Countess von Gortza she would outrank Madame von Hess, whose husband was only a baron. After that Alice forgot all about the undesirable eminence into which she was about to be thrust. All she could think of was that some day she and the Baroness would meet at a door, and that then the Baroness would have to step aside and allow her, because of her superior rank, to enter first into the room.

She became foolishly, exultantly happy. The next week she and Sylvia were going to Paris. She had ordered two new ball gowns at Paquin's and one at Worth's, and she and the Princess were going to spend two days together being fitted and shopping. Sylvia was treating her superbly. She showed no surprise at the sudden desire for lavishness in clothes on Alice's part, and was quite ready to accompany her to Paris, for it was Alice who had suggested the trip.

While she was getting ready, she remembered the details of the ball gowns. The one she was in doubt about—she might ask Paquin to take it back. The Worth

gown was iridescent gauze festooned with tiny rosettes of gold braid. She remembered the carpet of gold-fish skin which Ulrich had spread in her honor on her bridal night. He would be sure to remember that when he saw the dress, and she was certain he would like it. The third gown was a *chef d'œuvre*. Sylvia had really wanted it for herself, but seeing how delighted Alice was with it, she had offered to stand back, saying that it would become her very much better than herself. Alice doubted this, but in spite of her pale coloring, she had always looked well in white, and Ulrich had frequently said that he loved best to see her in white or cream-colored stuffs. The gown was made over a foundation of white taffeta silk, over this were draped two thicknesses of white silk mull. The lower thickness of mull had been tinted to show every color of the spectrum from faintest pink and palest blue to deepest purple. Paquin had assured her that an artist of no mean fame had tinted the gown, and certainly no tyro at color effects could have achieved such an illusion of light and shade. The deep purple lines were fine as hair-lines, and when the mull was spread out on the palm of the hand one could barely detect this one boldly dark fine line, but it was there, and through some subtle harmony of color, it was in no way conspicuous when draped on the figure, but merely communicated tone and dignity to the general effect. There was suspicion of gold, a hint of silver, and when the wearer of the gown moved, the illusion was created by snow-flakes assembled into a gossamer-like fabric, or of a soap-bubble yielding its fragile splendor to enrich some spider-web gown.

Ulrich would be sure to like it.

The price was ruinous—25,000 francs, and Sylvia, on hearing the price, said very frankly that she could not

have afforded it. She seemed to take it for granted that Alice would not want to spend such a preposterous sum for one very perishable gown, for the cruel spurs of the cavalry officers would work destruction to this fairy-like fabric the first time it was worn. But Alice, with an assumption of utter aloofness, said:

"Very well, I'll take it, if you are sure that the alterations can be made without injury to the gown."

Paquin was sure of this, and when the transaction was all but concluded, Alice, looking up, caught sight of Sylvia's face. The Princess, visibly alarmed, took the girl aside:

"Forgive me, dear," she whispered, "are you quite sure that you can afford to pay such a price for one dress?"

"Quite sure," replied Alice calmly.

Had not Ulrich told her that he wanted her to be riotously extravagant in the matter of clothes? Besides that, the other gowns were not expensive, only four hundred and six hundred francs apiece. She meant to keep the snow-flake dress until the end of the season, and then, when she had worn each of her other gowns two or three times, she would appear in this brand new wonder-dress. She would not dare wear so splendid a gown, at any rate, before she had gained a little more *aplomb*, a little more assurance.

She had imagined that it would distress her to spend the money her lover had supplied her with. She found to her amazement that, having accepted it, it gave her no pain to spend it; that, indeed, she derived a good deal of enjoyment from her purchases. Suddenly it occurred to her that she was really pitifully frivolous and weak. Particularly she was ashamed of herself for remembering always and always that she now ranked Madame von Hess.

The Baroness happened to be in the King's morning room, where the audiences, now all informal because of his Majesty's failing health, were held, and when Alice walked through the room to leave it, it so happened that the two women met at the door, quite as she had imagined the meeting would be. The Baroness, with a smile, fell back. There was not a vestige of annoyance on her face, as she offered to let the Countess take precedence over her with the gracious manner with which one would push forward a bright, ambitious child. Alice felt this keenly, and she realized with a sudden distaste for herself that she had desired to humiliate and mortify the Baroness, and that failing to effect this annoyance, her pleasure in her new toy was very appreciably impaired.

Suddenly, too, various episodes from the books she had devoured in her strange, pent-up girlhood came back. In those days it had seemed to be a wonderful and a very terrible thing to be a favorite of royalty. Now it seemed neither terrible nor wonderful, but the most natural thing in the world.

A revulsion of feeling set in. She was ashamed of her feeling against the Baroness. Certainly Madame von Hess had not deserved to be hated so bitterly. She had done her no harm. If harm had been done, it was she, Alice, who had worked the other woman an injury by stepping upon the canvas and precluding the possibility of Ulrich's return. Possibly that was why she hated the Baroness so furiously, because she had done her this harm, and this glimpse of the unethical possibilities of her own heart filled her with dismay.

When Ulrich came that evening, he was unusually grave, even taciturn. She thanked him profusely for getting her the title, but she felt that her words lacked sincerity. He said sadly:

"I don't believe you are very happy about it, Alice, and yet I had hoped to give you a very great pleasure."

"You have given me great pleasure."

Her voice was constrained and forced. She felt that she could not continue with him in this hypocritical key, and said boldly, "It is true I am a little afraid of the limelight."

He sat down upon the couch, and drew her down beside him. She was afraid she had hurt him. She was sorry, and to make amends, she began kissing him, employing the caresses which she knew he loved best—long, lingering, hungry kisses upon the eyes, and quick, nipping kisses upon cheek and ear. But he did not respond. He did not even appear to notice her blandishments.

"Alice, I had a reason for getting you the title. A decent pretext presented itself, and I vastly preferred to have the King bestow it to having grant it myself after his death. My reason is this: I felt, dear—" She could see that he was forcing himself to speak lightly, "I felt that if through some accident you were to lose your reputation, it would be easier for the Countess of Gortza than for Miss Vaughn to sustain the injury."

"What makes you think that such an accident may occur, Ulrich?"

"Because such things happen sometimes, and it is the one blow from which ultimately I would be unable to protect you. I am very glad, Alice, that I took this step, because it brought to light a little intrigue."

"What do you mean?" she demanded anxiously.

"It's an abominably awkward thing to tell you."

Then, with many pauses, he told her that Sylvia had come to him in great excitement, and upon hearing that Alice was to be made a Countess had told him of von Bardolph's threat to undermine her reputation. Sylvia

was certain that this business of the title would hurry the catastrophe.

"Why does von Bardolph hate me so bitterly?" asked Alice.

"He doesn't want me to marry you. A *mésalliance* at a Court at which he is *Hofmarschall*! Unspeakable!"

The truth flashed upon her. Quickly she said:

"Then he must have guessed that Sylvia and Gunther want you to marry me, so as to put you out of the succession."

Ulrich looked at her in amazement. She grew crimson with bewilderment. She had never meant him to know that she knew.

"How did you know of this little game of my cousins?"

"Did *you* know of it, Ulrich?"

"Certainly. It amused me intensely. But how did you come by the knowledge—intuition?"

She was too honest to fib.

"Gunther told me the night of the first Court Ball."

"I admire his cheek!" he exclaimed.

"So do I," smiled Alice. "It's not impertinence, or even impudence. It's just plain cheek."

"Was he insulting?" There was a menace in Ulrich's voice. "If he was, I'll horsewhip the puppy."

"No, no, he took it for granted that I am what I am not."

Ulrich looked at her sharply. She hoped he would not ask for an explanation. If he did, she would be sure to employ the words "virtuous woman" or some other phrase that he would resent and that would send him off like a sky rocket. Evidently he understood, for he dropped the subject, saying merely:

"Do you know, Alice, I have often thought that Gunther would make an excellent drummer."

"I shall tell him you said so the next time I see him."

They both laughed. The laugh cleared the atmosphere.

"Does Sylvia suspect the truth?" she demanded.

"I do not know. I have wondered. Look here, dearest, we've got to have a talk, you and I."

"Aren't we having a talk?"

She sidled up to him and placed her head against his shoulder. It struck her as remarkable that of the two she was the more tranquil. He made several efforts to speak, but did not succeed. She became suspicious. She moved away from him.

"Ulrich," she said insistently, "has something happened to my reputation already?"

"No, no," he replied, beginning to pace the floor.

"Ulrich dear, I do not think the *Hofmarschall* would dare to carry out his threat. He wouldn't wish to offend you, I am sure."

"You don't understand, dear. I am nothing to him. The race of von Dette is everything. He would sacrifice any individual member of the royal house—because to him the individual is a negligible quantity—in order to save our race from the contamination of a *mésalliance*."

"Ulrich, I have an idea."

"What?"

"Who was it, Bismarck or someone, who said that in a grave crisis tell your enemy the truth, because you will not be believed. Now let us tell the truth, to von Bar-dolph I mean, in the hope that he will believe us. Let us—you—tell him that you have no intention of marrying me."

"I beg your pardon—is that statement precisely true?"

"Well, then, since I do not intend capturing you—"

"I would rather have you substitute the word 'marrying' for 'capturing,'" he said coldly.

She flushed. Blatant and crude again! When, oh, when, would she learn not to offend him with her sharp repartee?

"Very well," she said meekly. "At any rate, Ulrich, why not disarm the venomous old reptile by telling him the truth—that there is no thought of marriage between us."

"My dear," he said stiffly, "do you realize what you are asking me to do? You are asking the man who loves you above everything else in the world to brand you as — No, dear. I am bad enough, heaven knows. I may have done wrong in not marrying you. But I am not as low as all that."

"I think that is a mistaken notion of honor, Ulrich. You would not be branding me—as you call it, in a general way. You would probably save my name. You do not imagine I am such a fool as to suppose that the servants do not realize the *status quo*, do you? This venomous spider can be of service to you. Go and tell him the truth. If he is so devoted to your race, he must have some feeling of loyalty to you, the more so, as you will be Prince Regent when the King dies. And he will certainly prefer serving and pleasing you to mortifying and angering you."

The surprise in Ulrich's eyes gave way to admiration.

"By George!" he exclaimed, "I wouldn't have thought it of you. My dear child, if you had been born and bred at Court, you couldn't have evolved a more brilliant scheme for circumventing the old fox."

"Then you'll do it?"

"No, my dear, I will not." He kissed her fingers tenderly. "Your scheme has one weak point only. It would

make a cad of me. And that I cannot very well consent to."

"Then——"

"Yes, he'll try, and he is resourceful. You see, dear, he thinks if it—about us—is generally known, it will make marriage impossible."

Her eyes held a question. His nervousness suddenly passed away. He had come to the crucial point at last.

"Alice, you realize, dear, don't you—that it would make marriage very difficult?" He did not give her a chance to reply, but continued hurriedly: "If it were not for the old devil, we might have pulled along nicely. You took the Court by storm. The younger set is quite wild about you—Madame von Hess, von Garde——"

"Baroness von Hess," said Alice quickly. All the jealousy that this woman aroused in her, was immediately on the alert. "Baroness von Hess——"

"What is the matter?" asked Ulrich suspiciously. "Why do you repeat the name in that odd way?"

All at once the girl was very busy with the fire tongs and a recalcitrant coal.

"Oh, nothing," she said carelessly, "I have barely spoken to her."

"Well, you have spoken to von Garde several times."

Alice laughed mirthlessly.

"Yes," she said, "but you had better not count on von Garde's being of use."

"Why not?"

"I suppose I ought to tell you, Ulrich. Von Garde has asked me to marry him."

"The devil he has!" Ulrich regarded her in open-mouthed astonishment. "What did you say to him?"

"What a ridiculous question, Ulrich!"

"Look here, Alice, I consider this a very serious thing. Are you sure you're not fond of him?"

"Ulrich!"

"Answer me."

"Of course not. What an expression to use, Ulrich! One likes a man or one loves him. One isn't fond of him."

"Do you like him?"

"Immensely."

"I hope, Alice, you do not think me jealous. A man who is jealous is doubtful of his own powers, and I never underestimate myself. On the whole, since you like him immensely, I see no reason why you shouldn't see a good deal of von Garde."

"No, Ulrich, dear, I shall avoid him. He—it—oh, dear, I feel so uncomfortable when I'm with him."

"Uncomfortable!" Ulrich arose, and walked through the room. "Uncomfortable," he said again. "Why, in heaven's name, should you feel uncomfortable in the presence of a man whose affection you do not reciprocate? Women are commonly supposed to bask in the admiration and adoration of men."

There was an ugly look in his face. In spite of his disavowal she realized that he was frantically jealous and suspicious. She regretted having told him.

"Nevertheless, I must insist on seeing as little as possible of von Garde. It wouldn't be fair to him to encourage him to see me."

Ulrich came and stood closer to her. The ugly, hungry look in his face deepened. She could see that he was restraining himself with difficulty from taking hold of her, grasping her, crushing her. For the first time she experienced a sensation of loathing and repugnance, for she saw that at the moment he saw in her one thing

only, the woman who most adequately answered his requirements, who afforded him a degree of intoxication he had never known before. She turned her head away.

"Alice, are you in love with von Garde? Are you going to marry him?"

"No, no, of course not. What silly questions, Ulrich!"

"I don't believe you."

"Ulrich—even if I loved him, how could I marry him? Unless I am greatly mistaken, Lieutenant von Garde is a man who has very rigid notions of a woman's honor and virtue. And even if I loved him, you do not suppose I would be low enough to marry him without telling him that I—that we——"

She broke off helplessly.

"If, understanding his rigid notions of honor, you thought enough of him to humiliate yourself so far as to make a clean breast of our affair, I should say that you loved him very dearly indeed. And if, having been told, he would not be willing to marry you, it would not keep him from loving you, or you from loving him."

She turned and faced him. Her temples were throbbing furiously. She saw in his eyes the bald, naked fear of the male who thinks he is to be robbed of his mate. A cry of disgust broke from her lips.

"Ulrich, how can you, how dare you insinuate such a thing? You don't suppose I would have two lovers at one time? This is horrible! You do not suppose I would do for any other man what I have done for you, because of your accursed rank——"

"If you loved him——"

"But I don't, I don't," she cried wildly. "I love you—you only."

The hurt look in his face died away. A sigh of re-

lief floated from his lips. He offered to put his arm about her waist, but she shrank from him.

"No, Ulrich, no."

"It's really too bad for von Garde, I'm sorry for him."

Her lover was suave and smooth once more. Wonderingly, she looked at him. How did he accomplish his instantaneous transformations? He continued:

"He would have brought so many delightful young officers to your home. And you are entitled to a retinue of admirers. I have had my fling. I am eight years older than you. I have no right to deprive you of the harmless pleasures to be derived from an innocent flirtation."

"I do not care to flirt."

"You do not seriously mean that."

"I don't think you understand, Ulrich dear, just how I love you. You do not understand, dear, that you have not merely eclipsed other men for me, but that you have completely blinded me to other men. Men are not men to me, they are just human beings who happen to dress differently from myself."

"Alice?" He was genuinely touched and ashamed of himself.

"Truly, dearest."

She began kissing him passionately. He allowed her to rain kisses upon his mouth and eyes, for a moment before responding, then he caught her tempestuously to his breast. They were locked in each other's arms, kissing each other madly, oblivious of everything save the vehemence of their emotions and the turbulence of their blood.

He was the first to withdraw from the embrace.

"This will never do, dear. Your kisses paralyze my brain. And we haven't settled the matter about which I came to speak to you."

"What else is there, Ulrich?"

"If you feel that it would be intolerable to continue on our present footing if the story got out, I would prefer marrying you now."

"I think we have settled the matter long ago, Ulrich."

He was not content with this. He pressed her to consider the matter carefully. He repeated and reiterated; she answered him negatively again and again. Finally, with a little sigh of weariness, she said, with a detached air that never failed to irritate him:

"Really, dear, I hate to accuse you of being tedious; but this conversation is fatiguing, to say the least."

Perplexed, he looked at her searchingly. There were times lately when she seemed a different woman to him from the little innocent playful girl with whom he had fallen so idiotically in love. It troubled him to think she had developed the power within the last few months to coolly create a distance between them with a few words.

She sat down opposite and not very near to him, on a footstool.

"Would you like to play a game of cribbage or bezique before we retire? It is only half-past nine. Are you tired?"

She delivered these words, so intimate and personal and apparently affectionate with the same careless aloofness as before. Anyone seeing her manner would have believed her to be discussing the latest play with some casual visitor.

Every fibre in his body began to tingle. Was there something of the devil in this woman, after all?

"That is the worst of an affair like ours," he said bitterly. "The keeping up of appearances."

"No," she said vigorously, "that is not the worst of it. There is something far worse—at least for the woman."

"What do you mean?"

She had jumped from the footstool, and was standing against the mantel. Suddenly he saw her body sway to and fro. She was crying.

"Alice darling, what is wrong?"

He had his arms about her, had her on his knees in a moment.

"I cannot tell you, Ulrich. There are some things I cannot tell even you."

"There should be nothing, sweetheart, that you cannot speak about to me."

There was an ineffable goodness and grace about him as he said this.

"What is it, Alice?"

He lifted her wet face to his, and kissed it passionately.

"Tell me, darling," he whispered.

She continued crying, making no effort to wipe away her tears, allowing them to stream over her face, which he was holding with one hand.

"I cannot help it," she sobbed, "it is a horrible feeling. Perhaps it will go away again, but sometimes it seems almost a physical pain when I remember that I can never be a mother. Oh, Ulrich, Ulrich, that is hardest of all to bear! I always loved children; their delicate little bodies, their sweet, soft limbs, their rose-petal fingers and toes, and their sweet, confiding ways, the developing brain which a mother can guide and mould. Ulrich, Ulrich, it is that more than anything else that makes our love seem unhallowed, a mere sensual and vile instead of a sacred and pure thing. Love between man and woman is always the same, as you once said; but if children spring from the union, if man and woman together share the duties and the higher

joy that children bring, then the sordidness of that relation seems washed away."

She began to weep again. If her face had not been so wet from her own tears she would have felt the moisture on his as he kissed her. Without intending to, she had excoriated him. He was blaming himself horribly. As a physician, if not as a man, he should have known that she was the type of woman who would take precisely this spiritualized, dematerialized view of their relations, who would crave maternity with incomparably greater vehemence than she had craved a mate. Why had he not let her alone? In a way he had ruined her life. He could never make her amends for the lack of children.

He thought again of a morganatic marriage. But he loathed the very idea of a "left-handed alliance." His dual duty seemed to cleave him in twain; on the one side was his duty to the state, which had been dinned into his ears and drilled into his brain since childhood; on the other hand was his duty to the woman. And he had enough prescience at the moment to realize that unless he could ask her to marry him in a whole-hearted way, in a manner that betokened his earnest desire to be married, he would only add to her hurt.

He suffered miserably, perhaps more than she, for hers, at the moment, was the soft luxury of grief dissolving itself in tears—tears which the man she adored was kissing away.

Suddenly she ceased weeping. She lifted her face. It shone with a strange radiance.

"Ulrich, my lover, what does it matter? What does anything matter, so long as I have you?"

CHAPTER XXI

Early in December,—the first snow was on the earth—the old King breathed his last. The end came quickly, and von Garde, at Sylvia's request, came to inform Alice that the Princess desired to see her as soon as possible.

It was the first time the young Aide had called on her, since she had rejected his offer of marriage, and she saw from his manner that it was painful for him to meet her face to face, alone; he declined her invitation to be seated, offering as an excuse that he had a number of matters to attend to for the Prince Regent.

"Oh, yes," said Alice rapidly, "that is what we must call Prince Ulrich now, is it not?"

After von Garde left, she stood for a few moments before descending to her car, which was waiting, lost in reflection.

Prince Regent! For ten years to come Ulrich would be Regent; in all but name he would be king. His word would virtually be law, the child king himself would be subject to his rule. And Ulrich loved her!

It occurred to her that the pale green tailor-made she was wearing would not be suitable to wear in appearing before Princess Sylvia. She summoned her maid, and changed her suit for a dark grey gown. She became unaccountably nervous. In order to gain time, she bade Estelle dress her hair over again, pretending it had become dishevelled in changing skirts.

She believed that her nervousness was due to fear of

meeting Ulrich. It was foolish to feel like this, but she dreaded horribly meeting him to-day, perhaps in the presence of half a dozen people. She would have to be conventional, and offer him some conventional stock phrase of sympathy. It would be very trying. She hoped she would not break down. She hoped she would be able to see him alone if only for a minute. She wanted very much to be a comfort to him in this ordeal, for ordeal it was for him. He had been deeply attached to his grandfather.

It occurred to her that von Garde had not told her whether the Prince Regent had already passed a decree fixing the period during which Court mourning was to be observed. It was optional with him to make that period three months or only six weeks. If he made it three months, it would be March before the Court could resume its merry-making, its dinners and dances and balls, and as the last of February terminated the Court season, she would, in that case, not be able to wear her snow-flake dress that season. Paquin had assured Sylvia and herself that a complete revolution in styles would take place before next fall, and thus the twenty-five thousand francs she had paid for the gown would be thrown away. She regretted having saved the wonder-dress instead of wearing it at the last ball.

Suddenly she became aware of the trend of her thoughts, and the realization of her own shallowness sent a pang through her entire body. Good heavens, was this what she was coming to? This old man, the dead king, had been unusually kind and gracious to her; he had heaped kindness upon kindness on her, and her one thought in connection with his death was regret that she would not be able to wear a twenty-five thousand francs ball-gown!

Certainly, she had not grown to be the sort of woman into which in her naïve girlhood, she had expected to mature.

She wondered what Ulrich would think of her if he knew what had passed through her mind upon hearing of the King's demise. She was bitterly ashamed of herself. The heartlessness which her own inward vision had revealed to her, for such she considered it, seemed a blacker turpitude than the carnal sin of having a lover. Perhaps there was truth in the claim that "respectable" folks advanced. Perhaps a woman could not live an unchaste life without debilitating her entire moral make-up. But why should this be so? Why should a man be able to live a wild life and yet remain moral in other respects? Why not a woman?

This seemed to her a frightful injustice. It shifted the much-discussed question of the inequality of the sexes to an entirely different footing. She resented this inequality. She rebelled, and then abruptly she told herself that such a theory was both mischievous and absurd, and that she might have had precisely the same thoughts if she had been Ulrich's wife. But the suspicion that her lax life had something to do with her unmoral trend of thought persisted. She recalled what Ulrich had said about his willingness to make her his wife if at any time it became imperative for her welfare. Why could she not force herself to swallow her foolish pride and ask him to marry her? He was stronger than she. He was not an immoral man, as she had once supposed. There was beauty and fineness in his spiritual texture, and if she could live with him honestly and openly, without having to resort every day to a host of miserable subterfuges in order to keep up appearances, if, best of all, she would have the right to

become a mother, it would help her to become a better woman. If the necessity for constant prevarication and obliquity could be obviated, it would help straighten out her moral backbone. Sometimes, indeed, she thought it was not a carnal sin at all to live with a man without being his wife. Sometimes, too, she thought that Ulrich thought as she did, and felt all this quite as keenly, and that he would have been glad if she had asked him to marry her. He lacked the courage to urge marriage on her, and that was why, whenever he offered her marriage, he appeared so diffident. If he ever reproached her, after marriage, the right spirit in which to accept the reproaches would be to consider them as part punishment for having first lived with him before marriage.

But it would be impossible to ask him at that moment, when the highest honor of the state had come to him. It would be a long time to wait until Egon came of age; ten years of qualms of conscience, of fear of losing him, and fear of losing her reputation. But even ten years were bound to come to an end, and if he would marry her at the end of the time, she would be satisfied. She felt certain that the time would come when he would offer her marriage, not in the half-hearted, half-afraid, diffident way which he employed at present, but in the warm, pulsating, insistent manner he had when urging a point he truly wanted to carry.

She blamed her cowardice and lack of stamina in not resisting him at the outset, in not accepting his offer of marriage instead of deciding as she did from notions of false pride and mistaken generosity and love. There were times when it was healthier, more wholesome for all concerned to exact a sacrifice than to make it.

With the knowledge she now had of his character, she told herself that if she had that chapter of her life to

relive, she would succeed in forcing him to ask her with all a wooer's customary eagerness instead of making himself appear as a sort of burnt offering, in case she insisted upon a marriage. Nevertheless she was not quite sure of this. She was unable to compass this now, and she had matured and developed immeasurably since then. She was not an unopened volume to him, but a book whose pages have been cut and which has been enjoyed at leisure, and there was no doubt in her mind that, no matter how dearly prized the book is whose substance is known, it does not possess the magical charm, the promise of illimitable vistas which the unopened tome holds out.

It seemed to her that Estelle, who consulted the mirror repeatedly while coiling the heavy, meerschaum-colored braids of hair about her mistress's head, must have read her thoughts. The girl knew that Ulrich was her lover. Alice paid her well, and had told her briefly that she paid such exceptional wages because she desired a discreet servant. The maid understood perfectly on what terms she was serving her mistress, and why she was receiving twice as much money as she would have been paid elsewhere. Alice considered this degrading. She wondered if Estelle was a virtuous girl. If she was, she probably despised her mistress.

She dismissed the maid and sat quite still, thinking. It was impossible to go to Sylvia's, feeling as she did. She arose from the chair in which she was sitting, and following a sudden impulse, slipped to her knees before the bed. She had not prayed for years, but now, full of self-loathing and disgust, feelings, which she did not attempt to analyze, but which affected her as nostalgia might have done, drove her to her knees.

She could remember no prayer adapted to her need,

She said the Lord's Prayer twice, which was all she could think of, but when she came to "and give us this day our daily bread" she faltered, and it seemed indecent for her, who was accepting a fortune from her lover, to repeat those words framed for the needs of the indigent, for honest workers.

She began crying softly, her eyes lying against the counterpane of Venetian lace. She did not know how long she had been crying when Estelle came in. The girl shrank back on seeing her mistress on her knees, but Alice called to her to come in. She struggled to her feet. It seemed to her that there was a look of compassion in the girl's eyes.

"Countess, the Prince Regent asks if you will see him."

Alice went to him immediately.

"I had to come and see you for a moment, dear. No one knows I am here. They think I am in my rooms. I felt the necessity of sitting quietly at your side for a moment."

"Did he suffer?"

"No, dear. It was a peaceful passing away. I would rather not speak of it now."

"Very well, Ulrich."

"You have been crying?"

"Yes."

"I am glad, sweetheart, that you felt some affection for my grandfather. He was very fond of you. He spoke of you just before he died."

"Did he?" she said.

Her humiliation deepened. Ulrich thought she had been weeping in sorrow for the King; when in reality she had been concerned only with herself, and the best that she could have said of herself was that she had



SHE COULD REMEMBER NO PRAYER ADAPTED TO HER NEEDS.

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and prayed in repentance of her own callousness, she could not tell Ulrich that. She felt instinctively that at the moment, indelicacy would be a worse offence than truthfulness.

She continued:

My grandfather said to me: 'Ulrich, be kind to the little orphan girl. She is as true as gold.'

He knew——"

Yes, he knew. But he never let me suspect it before—not even when I asked him for your title."

Ulrich, I was not worthy of his kindness."

She felt crushed, annihilated, abased.

He pressed her hand gently.

"Don't, dearest," he said. "Don't."

"Don't mean because of the—usual thing. I mean general."

"We are likely to experience that feeling, dearest, when some one who has been near to us, dies. We feel the majesty of death; it brings out what is best in us."

She could not continue to dwell upon herself at the moment, and remained silent. In a little while his disposition to speak vanished, and he described to her the death-bed scene.

When he arose to go, she said:

"My father sent for me. Will you take me in your automobile, or shall I go in my own?"

"You had better go in your own, dear—for your own sake. I left Sylvia weeping industriously." His lips smiled disdainfully.

"Industriously! Aren't you a bit hard on Sylvia?"

He shook his head.

"—Sylvia hasn't an unselfish, sincere spot in her body."

"Her mourning was 'commanded' for six weeks only,

Ulrich choosing the shortest term out of consideration for the younger set.

So the Court went into official mourning. The great hall of state which was used as a ball-room was formally closed, the doors sealed and draped in black and purple. Black and purple immersed the large entrance hall, all the semi-official rooms on the main floor, and billowed upon the exterior and along the windows of the *Koenigliches Palais* and of the *Neues Palais*. Black and purple was conspicuous everywhere to signify that the Court was officially mourning the King.

The young officers and ladies of the Court flirted more clandestinely than before, and instead of playing bridge in Sylvia's morning room, they withdrew, out of deference to her, to some private sitting room.

At the end of six weeks, the Court automatically went out of mourning. A date was set for the last ball but one of the season. Flirtations were resumed with their old vigor; there were theatre-parties, and dinners after the opera, and weddings. The old King had dwindled into a memory, and courtiers, climbers, time-servers of both sexes who had formerly vied with each other in dragging into their conversation the words "His Majesty" and the "King" now mouthed and ranted about "His Royal Highness" and "the Prince Regent." It was the same old comedy that has been enacted since history first began and kings flourished and were superseded or conquered or died. "*Le Roi est mort! Vive le Roi!*" "The King is dead—long live the King!"—the King, who was a delicate, precocious, nervous child of nine.

Ulrich was exceedingly busy these days. He was forced to neglect his beloved Clinic, his cherished gelatine and agar plate cultures of the *diplococcus pneu-*

monia and the bucolis pestis, and to neglect Alice as well. Sometimes she did not see him for a week at a time. But no matter how busy he was, no matter how important an affair of state kept him up long after midnight, he allowed no day to go by without telephoning her.

Now it was that Alice began to see the wisdom of having an entire house to herself, a house so spacious that Ulrich could have his own suite of rooms in it, a sleeping room, a work-room, a small laboratory, even. She resumed her house-hunting, and was ably seconded by Sylvia, who was ready at all times for little informal excursions of any sort. The Princess was a curious jumble of traits. When alone with one or two friends, she unbent to such a degree as to give the impression of desiring to eliminate her rank; but in public, or on semi-official occasions, she insisted upon the strictest observance of and adherence to ceremony and etiquette. She forced poor old Schwellenberg, "the meal-bag," as Alice had once maliciously called her, to stand for two hours at the christening of one of Gunther's sister's children, and the poor old woman in consequence developed sciatica. Alice carried her off to her own apartment, and tended and nursed her as she would have tended and nursed a mother or a sister. The "meal-bag" thanked her with tears.

Many guests Alice entertained in an informal way. Ulrich wished her to do so, and Ulrich's wish, of course, was law. Possibly the utter indifference she felt to the people who flocked about her, contributed to her success, for having no direct interest in anything or anybody, she lent a willing ear to everyone and had a sparkling phrase ready at all times to slip into conversational gaps.

"She is the best listener in Hohenhof-Hohe," said old General von Hollen, who had related anecdotes to her of the Franco-German war to which no one else would listen because they had been told and retold so often.

"Which means," sneered von Bardolph, to whom the remark had been addressed, "that she deliberately muzzles the cleverest tongue in Europe."

For von Bardolph came along with the others. He was no longer Master of Ceremonies. The morning after the old King's demise he had asked the Prince Regent to graciously accept his immediate resignation. Ulrich urged him to remain, believing it impolitic to break with him, but the old courtier remained firm in his request. It occurred to Ulrich later, in discussing the matter with Alice, that von Bardolph desired to shift his responsibility for the behavior of the younger von Dettles from his shoulders, and that his threatened machinations against her would cease with his office, but Alice had a different theory. She thought von Bardolph was trying to marry her to von Garde, and that he had merely refrained from causing her trouble so far as he first wished to see if he could bring about this marriage. But even when it became apparent to all who watched the little comedy, that she gave no thought to the handsome young Aide, no dynamiting occurred. Alice now began to incline to Ulrich's belief and plucked up courage. War scares have been known to blow over many and many a time.

Baroness von Hess was another of Alice's frequent visitors, and the latter religiously returned her every call. Through some perversity of fate the two women were never alone. Both longed for closer acquaintanceship, yet both dreaded it. Once, when Freiherr von Bardolph was the only other person in the room with them,

Alice fled incontinently, when she saw him preparing to leave. Why, after all, cultivate an acquaintance that would never ripen into friendship? Why seek the companionship of a woman whom at the bottom of her heart she hated with all her might?

When the Court went out of mourning, and the little King came more into evidence, the ladies and the gentlemen attached to the royal household made every effort to pamper and spoil him. The child was inordinately vain and his ambition was as insatiable as Sylvia's. Ulrich kept him well in the background, but in some way, probably through Egon's valet, it got about that the little King was continually entreating the Prince Regent to issue instructions that in future, the King, though a minor, was to be addressed as "your Majesty." This was contrary to the usage of European Courts, which ordained that all royal children until their twelfth year were to be addressed merely as "Prince" and "You," and after the twelfth year as "your Highness." The rumor spread and the officers and the ladies-in-waiting began addressing Egon as "your Majesty." Ulrich learned of this. There was a "bloodless battle," as old Frau von Schwellenberg described it. Egon was disciplined severely, and was not permitted to ride or walk out without his tutor for a fortnight, not even through his own garden. He was also deprived of all bonbons, sweetmeats and puddings. Some said that the Prince Regent had been unkind enough to spank the little King. This was probably not true. Ulrich did not believe in punishing corporally a child over five years old.

Sylvia never condescended to be bothered with Egon. She and the child detested each other. Ulrich brought him to see Alice in the morning, and Gunther frequently brought the little lad with him. Gunther had acquired

the habit of running in to see his "*Cousinchen*" once a day, and Alice grew genuinely fond of him. Once in two months, Gunther paid a flying visit to England. "I've a little cousin over there—an orphan," he confided to Alice. "Of course she has everything that money can buy, but she's lonesome, poor little thing. And she's pathetically fond of me. So I run over to England as often as my financial condition permits, and give Mary the time of her life. When she's a little older—she's only twelve now—I want Sylvia to have her here for a month or so. She'll have a better time in Holze than she has at St. James, I'll wager."

One day when Egon had remained after Gunther had left, Alice, in answering his prattling, unconsciously used the expression, "Cousin Ulrich." The child looked at her in perplexity.

"He is not your cousin, Countess," he said. "Everybody else calls him Prince Regent."

"I spoke of him as you do," said Alice quietly.

The child went back to his toys. Alice had fitted up one room for him with tin soldiers, books and games, where he could play to his heart's content. Suddenly Egon looked up.

"I think," he said, "that you and Cousin Ulrich are very fond of each other."

The child's perspicacity troubled her. She spoke to Ulrich about it.

"I'm afraid you ought not to let Egon come and see me so often. One wouldn't imagine that such a small child could suspect——"

"Suspect what, dear? He knows we're not married."

"You know as well as I do what I mean, Ulrich."

"He is beginning to ask embarrassing questions. You and I were not required to start those."

"What do you tell him?"

"I answer him truthfully."

"Ulrich!" She was horrified. "You don't mean to say that you tell a child of nine the truth about certain matters?"

"Why not? You know as well as I do that when a precocious child is denied certain information, it leads to a morbid, prying, unhealthy curious habit of mind that is deadly. I have written an article for the *Medizinische Wochenschrift* on the subject after studying Egon's psychology. Here—I have it somewhere about me." He found the clipping and handed it to her. In the centre of the page was a small picture which she had not seen before. She commented upon this.

"It's my medical journal face, dear. They pose me in different attitudes and varying raiment to correspond to the divers parts I play upon the stage of life."

"You seem a different man, Ulrich." She went on looking at the little picture. It fascinated her. "You seem older, serious—" she faltered, and said no more. She did not like to tell him that there was a look of nobility in the poor little photograph that was not always visible in his face. "The picture they published of you previously, half a year ago, that also seemed rather unlike you. I did a ridiculous thing, Ulrich, when I got hold of that former picture. I——" she stopped short.

"Yes?" he prompted.

"No, I will not tell you. I am forever telling you all the ridiculous things I do on your account."

"I love to hear them. Come, sweetheart, tell me about this particular, ridiculous thing."

"No, Ulrich. I am spoiling you. You never tell me the ridiculous things you do on my account. Perhaps you never do anything ridiculous for me."

"Quite right," he cried gaily. "What is ridiculous, sheer nonsense, when you do it for me, is quite in order when I do it for you, because you are the cause of it."

She was delighted with the obvious little compliment. She kissed him rapturously.

"Now tell me about Egon, Ulrich."

"Well, he asked the question with which children usually open fire. How do babies happen to drift into the world?"

"Yes?"

"I was unprepared to answer the question, because I had not expected it yet. So I told him the stork story, embroidering it artistically, as I thought. He listened attentively. I flattered myself he was impressed. When I concluded, he said:

"'Cousin Ulrich, you told me some time ago that a gentleman never fibs.' After that, nothing remained but to tell him the truth."

"How could you!"

Ulrich laughed.

"My little Puritan," he said tenderly, "Egon probably suspected the truth, at any rate."

"Nevertheless, he ought not to come here so often, particularly when you are here. What would you do if he questioned you concerning me—us?"

"I should say to him, 'Egon, though a gentleman may always demand information of a general character from another gentleman, no gentleman asks questions of a personal nature of any one.'"

Alice laughed. She said determinedly:

"I think he shouldn't see so much of me."

"On the contrary, I wish him to see more of you. Unless he bores you. I would like Egon to grow up under our joint influence. A boy needs not only a man's

strong hand to guide him, he also needs a woman's tender heart to cling to. And then——" he laughed cynically.

"Yes?"

"If von Bardolph should be ugly enough to try some devil's trick of his own to ruin your name, half the world will not believe the evidence of their own senses if it is generally known that Egon comes to see you regularly."

Every decent and honest instinct in Alice rose in rebellion.

"That means," she said coldly, "that you are using Egon as a cloak?"

Neither she nor Ulrich guessed how near the day was when she would need every bit of evidence she could marshal in her favor.

A few days before the last Court Ball of the season was to take place, Sylvia was taking tea with Alice. It so happened that they were alone, excepting for old Freiin von Schwellenberg, whose company Sylvia frequently preferred to that of her ladies-in-waiting, for the reason, as she avowed laughingly, that von Schwellenberg could always be depended upon to fall asleep at the right moment.

"You're going to wear the snow-flake dress, aren't you, Alice?" asked Sylvia. "You'll be the sensation of the evening. You will probably be the only woman wearing an entirely new gown."

"I am not going to wear it," said Alice, with averted eyes. She could not bear the thought of the dress since the King's death.

"Why not?"

"The fact is, I don't think I'll want to wear it at all. I've been wanting to ask you whether you wouldn't take

it off my hands. It is vastly becoming to you, more so than to me, because you are dark."

"You know that's not true, Alice," replied the Princess. "You are the most stunning creature any woman ever had the bad fortune to see in that gown. I couldn't wear it."

"That's very nice of you, Sylvia. I shall not wear the dress. If you care for it, I shall be glad to let you have it for the price of any other gown you may have been expecting to buy—your own price, I mean."

Alice felt that she was doing proper penance in making this offer. If Sylvia accepted it, as she doubtless would, her own sinful thoughts would be expiated for, for can self-abnegation in woman reach a higher notch than, after paying a fabulous sum for a gown of surpassing beauty, to part with it to a woman almost as handsome as herself, knowing that that other woman will shine and scintillate in the feathers which would have made herself a paragon of loveliness?

But Sylvia was firm in her refusal. She had quite set her heart on seeing Alice in the gown.

"You will capture every man. Positively you must wear the gown."

Alice smiled. She thought she knew what particular man the Princess meant. Again the horrible, haunting fear beset her as to the stand Sylvia would take should she discover the truth. Possibly she knew even now, for had she not warned Ulrich against von Bardolph? Still, she had given Ulrich the impression of believing in Alice, and of looking upon von Bardolph's menace as merely a threat.

She offered to get the dress and show it to Sylvia once more, hoping to persuade her to take it. While they were admiring it, the servant announced the Prince

Regent, and Sylvia, through two half-open doors—for they were in the third room off the small reception room in which Ulrich was waiting—called out to him:

"Oh, Ulrich, is it you? Countess Gortza has been showing me the loveliest gown in the world. Don't you want to see it?"

"Not until I can see the loveliest woman in the world in it," he gallantly answered. Halting at the door, he looked in discreetly, as if he had never before entered the sacred precincts of a lady's boudoir.

Sylvia laughed and walked into the reception room.

"Such a gown!" she sighed with mock covetousness. "The foolish child now refuses to wear it."

"Capriciousness," Ulrich replied in the same confidential tone in which the Princess had addressed him. "You're looking uncommonly well, Sylvia. That tailor-made is vastly becoming."

Sylvia kissed her finger-tips to him.

"How charmingly gallant we are to-day," she said carelessly.

Alice entered. Ulrich bowed more profoundly than he dared when strangers were present, and kissed her hand.

Old Schwellenberg awoke at this moment.

"*Herr Gott in Himmel*," she ejaculated with a truly tragic air, "*Der Prinz Regent. Ich bitte um Entschuldigung.*"

Ulrich gravely assured her that she had not slept at all, but had merely snored, and she joined in the laugh his drollery occasioned. Ulrich had a certain fondness for the old *Freiin*, and his manner of treating her, a blending of courtesy and teasing mischievousness, delighted the old woman.

Sylvia and the *Freiin* left soon after.

"Why won't you wear the gorgeous dress of which Sylvia was speaking?" asked Ulrich.

"I have a notion it will be a sort of hoodoo," she answered evasively.

"Nonsense!"

"Ulrich, dear, I have a confession to make about that particular dress."

"You paid a terrific sum for it, I suppose."

"Yes, I did." And she mentioned the sum.

He smiled indulgently.

"She is learning fast," he thought to himself, but her adaptiveness pleased him.

"If you are short in consequence," he said amiably, "all you need do is tell me."

"Of course I'm not short, not yet, at any rate," she retorted with charming candor. "But there is more to my confession." Truthfully she related how troubled she had been about the dress.

He listened attentively. The look of condemnation, of aversion which she feared might appear in his face, remained absent. He was not blaming her.

"Of what had you been thinking just before?" he asked gravely.

"I don't remember. I think I told you everything."

He came and sat down beside her and took her hand in his.

"No, dear, you did not tell me everything. Think, dear. Try and remember what immediately preceded your curious trend of thought."

In spite of the fact that he was caressing her hand, his manner was that of the physician.

Her memory remained a blank.

"After von Garde left you, what did you do?"

Patiently, he tried to lead back to the starting point her memory that had wandered afield.

"I went to my room to dress."

"And what did you think of? Of going to Sylvia?"

"Yes." A smile rippled over her face. "I thought of seeing you, Ulrich, dear, and it worried me horribly to think I would have to say some ridiculous, conventional words to you in the presence of half the Court. I was afraid I would be stupid, and say something displeasing to you, and aggravate your sorrow."

He put his arm about her, and drew her to him.

"That was what I wanted to hear, dearest," he said. "Don't you know that when the mind has been unduly stimulated by grief, sorrow, or anxiety, it suddenly fastens upon some extraneous subject that lends itself to being worried over, and which furnishes a counter irritant? Your 'wicked' thoughts about the dress were simply mechanical reflex action. Now, dear, if you have no faith in me as a man, do at least have some confidence in me as a physician."

As a consequence of the absolution Ulrich had vouchsafed her upon pathological grounds, she wore the snowflake dress to the ball, and as Sylvia had predicted, she created a *furor*. She had taken half the Court by storm upon her first appearance, but now, even those who hated her, and the ranks of her enemies were by no means inconsiderable, reluctantly admitted that her beauty was peerless.

"She is almost indecently beautiful," exclaimed Excellenz von Hermholz.

"She is lovely as children imagine the snow-fairy to be," lisped von Bardolph. His little rat eyes rolled incessantly in their sockets. "As I have said before, *Excel-*

lens, 'a face to change the map of empires,' unless someone interferes."

It was noticed and commented upon that soon after he left the ballroom he went to the wine-room, where contrary to his habit, for he neither drank nor smoked, he sat all evening, as if waiting for someone.

Much later, an hour or so after supper, Ulrich asked Alice to have some refreshment in one of the small conservatories that opened on the ballroom. She was on his arm. As they approached the conservatory a strange silence fell upon the room. In a crowded place, the atmosphere heavy with the breath of many persons, and surcharged with the emotions of many people, such a silence is prophetic of some unusual occurrence. Ulrich and Alice, delightfully busy with each other, and engaged in animated conversation, were oblivious of this strange undercurrent. A rumor was running and spreading like wild-fire, and Gunther, dispatched by Sylvia, was hurrying across the room to intercept Ulrich and his companion. He was making his way as rapidly as he could, but he was impeded by the crush of people. He could not elbow them and push his way, nor could he, when he came to an open bit of floor, break into a run. He was unable to reach Ulrich.

Unprepared, therefore, Alice suddenly found herself confronted by Freifrau von Garde, young von Garde's mother. This lady's manner was habitually a cross between hysteria and affectation—"exaltirt" as the Germans term it. The difference in manner and appearance between mother and son was one of the perennial topics of conversation in Hohe. Alice had avoided her with an instinctive shrinking. Now this woman barred her way, and her more than usually agitated manner spoke eloquently of some unpleasantness to be disclosed.

"Countess Gortza," she cried, with an exaggerated motion of hands and arms, intended to convey utter despair, "I believe you are at heart a good woman, or I would not make this appeal to you. My son has struck across the mouth General von Hollen, whom, everybody knows, is the best shot in Europe—because the General coupled your name with that of a certain illustrious person. My boy believes in you. You know very well that the duel which must take place unless Herman apologizes to the General, will result in my son's death. I implore you to save my boy by telling him the truth. He will believe no one but yourself."

Alice stood as if turned to stone. She was white as death. So the blow had fallen at last which she had dreaded and feared, and which she had braced herself against for a year. But the incredible swiftness with which it had fallen appalled and stunned her. She felt vaguely that she was unable to focus her attention on the problem which claimed her immediate attention. The moment was one of such intensity that she was unaware how long she stood silent, without answering. The silence was unbroken for a moment only, but to her, her blood throbbing tempestuously, it seemed a century.

Ulrich answered for her, speaking in his softest, most languorous voice:

"My dear *Freifrau*, your son is a gentleman and a gallant soldier; he would give you poor thanks for trying to rob him of the honor of protecting a virtuous woman's name."

But the hysterical instincts, perhaps, too, the maternal instincts, of the great lady were too acutely aroused to be silenced so easily, though it was the Prince Regent who signified his wish that the matter be dropped. What was standing at Court, social distinction, what were all the

fripperies and honor of Court life, compared to her boy's life? Her excited imagination pictured him dead. She cried menacingly:

"Your Highness can scarcely say anything else—but you—Countess von Gortza, I appeal to you once more."

A labyrinth seemed to open before Alice, and some one was inviting her to step over the brink. A blind force seemed to be pushing her on and on and on, and suddenly she realized that unless she spoke the truth she would hate herself for the rest of her life with a hate that beggars the torments of purgatory. She touched her tongue to her lips. They were hard and dry. Never had it been such a physical effort to speak, so hard to frame a sentence, so difficult to sift individual words out of the chaos of language and bind them into coherent sentences. Her misery was pitiable.

Ulrich attempted to slip his arm about her, and lead her away. She resisted, without seeming to resist. Her arm, which he tried again to place upon his, was like lead. He found it impossible without employing force.

Suddenly she spoke in an unnatural, hollow voice, a voice that might have been the aural spectre of some poor, sin-laden soul, risen out of the grave to unbosom itself of a confession without which peace and rest cannot be found.

"*Freifrau von Garde*," she said, "you may tell your son from me that he had better apologize to General von Hollen."

Ulrich did not again offer her his arm. His face was white as her own, and was convulsed with anger. He was furious, so furious, that it required every bit of his inherited breeding to keep him from giving immediate vent to his temper. He choked back his wrath, and without glancing at anyone, passed from the room alone.

Alice saw him go, but did not realize the import of his going. The shock of being denuded of this last remnant of reputation, to which she had clung so tenaciously, had stunned her sensibilities and made a perception of anything else impossible. She was aware that he had gone, but his going was only part and parcel of the nightmare in which she was living. A tremor passed over her. General von Ruegen, whose studied contempt of her in the past had verged almost on brutality, stepped forward.

"Countess Gortza," he said, "you are not well. May I offer you my arm?"

He took her to the ladies' parlor, and sent a waiter for some wine, and a maid for her wraps. He pressed the wine upon her, but she shook her head in dumb misery in protest against drinking it. The smell of the stuff made her ill. It brought back too vividly the supper room, the sweet, heavy odor of the flowers, the laughter of the women, the insinuating smiles of the men, and sweet heavens! the glances which Ulrich clandestinely bestowed upon her whenever he believed himself unwatched.

"Take me to my carriage," she begged. "Please, please get my carriage for me. I want to go home!"

General von Ruegen obediently dispatched a lackey for the Countess's carriage. At this moment Baroness von Hess entered the room. She saw the glass of wine, untouched upon the table before Alice.

"A glass of water will be better for her," she said in a cool, imperative voice.

The General effaced himself, and waited outside until time to help the girl to her carriage, grateful to be relieved of other responsibilities. Baroness von Hess meanwhile was forcing her to drink a glass of water.

"She is triumphing over me," thought Alice, and she

recollected how bitterly she had hated this woman, but nothing was further from the Baroness's mind.

"Poor little girl," she whispered, her arm about Alice's shoulder, "poor little girl! It is hard, but it will pass. Believe me, it will pass. You love him, and he loves you."

"And you?" Alice choked out the words almost unconsciously.

"I have wanted to tell you that right along. I did not love him, and, what is of more consequence to you, he did not love me."

It was impossible to doubt the Baroness's words, or the kindness which prompted her to speak at this moment. She continued: "He was amusing to me—I the same to him. There was no love, none, a little passion, perhaps, the pleasure of the chase for him, of resisting for me. Does it shock you to hear a woman confess that she gave herself to a man without even the excuse of love? Remember, dear child, our morality differs from yours. To us the honor of a *liaison* with a prince is a great one, not ninety-nine women out of a hundred would resist it. I am, perhaps, one of the few persons here, who realize that it was no thought of gain or vanity which made you succumb to Prince Ulrich. Now, I think, all know and all understand. And for once, our society, so cruel, so narrow, so petty, so vindictive, was rendered charitable by the magic of your personality and the purity of your love for the Prince. You will live through a few bad days, Countess, but be brave. Remember he loves you, and if you need a friend, send for me."

Alice's mind was still too hazy to attempt an analysis of the Baroness's motives. These were, in truth, wholly disinterested. She had not loved Ulrich, as she said, and

the honor of the *liaison* with him had been too dangerous to be indulged in indefinitely. She was thankful he was safely off her hands.

"I—I—want to go home," Alice said after a moment. "I thank you, Baroness. You have been very kind." She was struggling to regain her composure.

General von Ruegen appeared at the door as silently as he had vanished. He gave her his arm, and piloted her through the halls. An eloquent silence fell upon the men and women who were lounging about.

He helped her into the carriage, and pushed the fluffy flounces of her gown in after her. In her perturbation, she had forgotten her gown. As he was about to close the carriage door, she laid a trembling, cold hand upon his coat sleeve.

"*Herr General, Excellenz,*" she murmured. "Is he still here? Has his car gone?"

"I will go and find out," he said.

He came back in a moment. "He is still here," he said.

For a moment he feared she would ask him to carry a message, but she merely inclined her head, and said "Thank you" once more in a pitiful, heart-broken voice that brought the tears to the old man's eyes. He closed the door gently, feeling as if he were shutting in a corpse, shutting it in with its dead memories and its dead sins.

Through the speaking tube she called to the footman, and bade him open the window. The air inside the carriage was stifling.

"Drive home through the *Thiergarten*," she ordered.

The current of fresh air which streamed through the open window gave her some relief. Greedily she drank in the keen night air. The streets were deserted. The

pavement, wet from a light rain, showed a deep leaden hue under the electric lights. The carriage rolled lightly along the *Grosse Museenstrasse*, dim, distinguished and lonely, and then lurched into the *Grosse Opernstrasse*, into a sudden blaze of light and noise. There had been a ball at the *Grosses Opernhaus*, and the opera house was belching forth its visitors. As Alice's carriage, conspicuous by its snow-white horses, rolled by, a murmur of recognition agitated the crowd. Her excited nerves seemed to apprehend the words, "*Prinz Ulrich's Geliebte*." She grew crimson with mortification. So everybody knew! And she had held so tenaciously to her paltry, pitiful belief that no one knew, when the truth had been unmistakable to everyone—to everyone except that wretched, misguided boy.

She had publicly branded herself as a scarlet woman! Publicly branded as a scarlet woman! And her father had been a village divine!

By a fantastic trick of memory there arose before her eyes a vision of the day when she had broken off her engagement to Ned, because Sally had explained to her the nature of marriage! She remembered the horror, the shame, the unutterable disgust that had sprung up in her, that for days had not left her, that had been replenished as from some invisible well. She remembered she had vowed herself to celibacy that day, to abstinence from what had appeared to her as the most unthinkable terrible thing of which she had ever heard.

She had been giving herself to Ulrich for almost a year. She had supposed no one knew. She had sat with him in the royal box at the Opera and theatre, in the full glare of the public gaze, and she had supposed that no one knew. She had lain in his arms at night,

lulled and stilled by his caresses, and she had supposed that no one knew!

It suddenly occurred to her that he might be angry with her for speaking the truth in public, for not leaving it to him to arrange matters. She became horribly frightened. What, if in addition to the anguish of losing her last shred of self-respect, he would impose upon her the misery of his anger? She rebuked herself for harboring so absurd a suspicion. Ulrich angry with her! That was impossible, especially at such a moment. Ulrich, who was always so kind, so tactful, so careful of appearance for her sake, who had lied for her that very evening!

She became more tranquil. They were rolling along the *Thurn und Taxis Allee* in the *Thiergarten*. There were few lights, and these were tiny gas jets, not electric lights. The night was dark, and the poplars, taciturn and forbidding, standing like sentinels on both sides of the *Allee*, assumed gigantic proportions, seemed alive, seemed leviathans ready to seize her, to carry her away to some indescribable pit, to unknown horrors.

Terror swooped down upon her once more.

She leaned as far back as she could, and pulling down the shades, closed her eyes to shut out the terror of the blackness outside.

She seemed on the verge of madness. She thought she must surely go mad unless she could feel Ulrich's protecting arm about her. She began repeating his name to reassure herself, as if it were a cabalistic sign to keep away evil spirits.

"Ulrich, Ulrich, Ulrich!"

Thank heaven, they had left the *Thiergarten* and were rolling along the soft macadamized road that led to her

home! In front of the house she caught a glimpse of what she thought was his car.

She fairly flew up the stairs and into the lobby, tripping more than once in her haste.

"Ulrich, Ulrich, Ulrich!"

In another moment she would fling herself into his arms, would feel the warm pressure of his strong body, would feel his warm breath upon her neck. When her maid opened the door, she saw at a glance that there was no light in any of the rooms excepting in her sleeping room.

"Where is the Prince Regent waiting?" she asked in an agitated, excited voice.

The girl answered:

"He is not here, Madame."

She stumbled into her room. She allowed Estelle to remove her cloak and veil and gloves, and then she dismissed her.

"Ulrich, Ulrich, Ulrich!"

She repeated his name with ever increasing nervousness. Was it possible that he was angry? And at such a time, when her heart called for him?

"Ulrich, Ulrich, Ulrich!"

Could she not, by repeating his name, send to him some telepathic message that would send him hurrying to her side? Surely, he could not be so childish, so cruel as to harbor anger against her at such a moment! Anger, and why? Anger, because she had spoken the truth when to remain silent would have meant murder?

She heard the chug-chug of an approaching automobile. It slackened speed, it stopped. She sat quite still, waiting to hear the turning of his key in the lock. But the longed-for sound did not occur.

She heard footsteps on the pavement below. Again

she strained her nerves waiting, waiting for the sound of the key. And again she waited in vain.

She sat on the bed, huddled together. Her gown was unbuttoned, and half hung from her shoulders. It was almost four o'clock. Still she sat and waited, unconscious of the chill in the room. Suddenly she sneezed. That aroused her from her reverie. She had barely sufficient energy left to undress herself. The chill dampness of the small hours of the morning seemed to creep in from out of doors.

She undressed, barely brushing her beautiful hair, over which she usually loitered a good half hour, perfunctorily washing her face and hands, then crept miserably to bed, leaving the gas burning brightly above her head.

She tossed and tossed, but she could not fall asleep from thinking of him. She shivered. She was intensely cold. Why, oh, why, did he not come? Had he ever wanted her as much as she now wanted him? A spasm of pain shot through her. She thought she must go mad. She buried her face in the pillows and wept.

The clock struck five. She stopped crying and tried to think. But she was incapable of crystallizing her thoughts; they seemed merely to weave an undercurrent of pain for her heart. Could one's thoughts hurt? Madness, again.

The clock struck six. After that she slept.

When she awoke the clock was striking the hour—nine. Every stroke seemed to be a voice calling "Ulrich, Ulrich, Ulrich." Her thoughts resumed their thread at the exact point where sleep had broken it off. The illusion of continuity was so remarkable that for a

moment Alice believed she had not slept at all. Then she realized and remembered.

Estelle had turned out the gas while she slept, and had drawn the blinds.

Alice sprang out of bed, let in some light, and in her night-gown, her feet slipperless, ran to the telephone and gave Ulrich's private number, the number which was in possession of barely half a dozen persons besides herself. Ulrich's valet answered the 'phone.

"Johann, is the *Prinz Regent* up?"

"No, Countess. He gave instructions when he retired that he was not to be called."

"When did he retire?"

"At six."

"At what time did he return?"

Johann's voice expressed a momentary hesitation, then continued bravely: "It was a little after three, I should say, when he came home. He went directly to the laboratory, and when I followed him half an hour later with his cigarette case, which he had forgotten, he was pacing the floor, and—and——"

"Yes, Johann?"

"It has never happened before, Countess. He would not smoke."

"Johann, as soon as his Highness awakens, ask him to call me."

"Yes, Countess."

She replaced the receiver, and sat crouching at the *escritoire*, wondering what it all meant. Probably he was nerving himself to tell her he would marry her. She felt she would hate him if he made the offer at such a time in his usual condescending, sacrificial way. What happiness it would be if he came to her and said: "Alice, I want you to marry me," in the tender, impassioned,

reverent tone he employed when genuine and sincere. "Alice, I want you to marry me." Would he speak those words to her in *that* tone?

She arose and stretched herself wearily. Quarter after nine.

She would bathe and breakfast and dress—that would help pass the time, and perhaps, perhaps he would be awake shortly, and then he would ring her up on the telephone. It occurred to her that he might call her while she was bathing, and she eliminated the bath. She was dressed and had her cup of chocolate by half past ten, but there had come no telephone call. The clock struck eleven. Her impatience and anxiety got the better of her. Again she went to the 'phone, and again Johann answered.

"Is the Prince Regent up yet?"

"Yes, Countess. I—I——" the honest fellow began stuttering and stammering.

"Did you forget to give him my message?" Alice asked smoothly.

"No, Countess. I gave him your message. He said nothing."

"Is he at home now?"

"Yes, Countess."

"Call him." The voice of Johann became very faint and uncertain over the last words. He returned to the telephone in a second's time.

"His Highness regrets—he is busy."

Alice hung up the receiver without replying. She felt as if some one had struck her a blow in the face. Her heart seemed to have forcibly stopped. Had it come to that between them? And why?

Von Garde was announced. She was tempted to let Estelle tell him that she was indisposed and unable to

see him. Why had he come? What would he say? She vaguely thought that it would be cowardly, selfish and inhuman to refuse to see him. She swallowed ten grains of bromide before she had sufficient courage to face him.

She was so agitated, as she entered the reception room in which von Garde was waiting, that she was unable to utter a word. The young officer bowed stiffly, but did not accept the chair to which she motioned. She herself collapsed, rather than sat down upon a chair.

"Countess von Gortza, I have come to ask you a simple question. You heard of the occurrence last night in the wine-room?"

She forced a half smothered "Yes."

"I am told that afterward, my mother made an unpleasant scene. It is reported that you said——"

He came to a dead stop.

"Why don't you go on?" she demanded. Her self-possession had returned. She could not shirk telling him the truth now any more than she had shirked telling it the night before. If anything, it was easier now.

He did not reply to her question, and when she looked at him again, she saw that he was fumbling at his collar, as if struggling for air. The distress pictured in his face was horrible to behold. His face was livid; his eyes were unnaturally bright. Compassion for him overcame her own distress.

"What did you say—your last words?" he demanded abruptly.

"I said," she retorted, "that you owed General von Hollen an apology."

"Great God! Then it is true."

She arose, and crossed to the fire-place, turning her

back on him. She clung to a chair for support. Finally, she said:

"Yes, it is true."

He came and stood beside her. She experienced a singular curiosity as to what he was about to do. She thought that possibly he would shoot her, but she felt no fear. She thought she would almost be glad to have her troubles and perplexities ended for her in that simple, brutal way. But when she faced him, she saw that he had no weapon in his hands. Suddenly he raised his hands and took her roughly by the shoulders, his fingers pressing into her tender flesh until she winced.

"Tell me it is not true," he said, "and I will believe you."

Her eyes were dim with tears. She pitied him immeasurably.

"It is true," she said in a hopeless, forlorn voice.

He relinquished his grasp on her shoulders, and walked to the door. Then he came back to her once more.

"True or not," he said wildly, "I will not believe that you are not a good woman. I love you. I love you with a passion and a tenderness that I would not have believed it possible for mortal man to feel for mortal woman. Countess von Gortza—Alice—will you marry me?"

"It is out of the question," she answered kindly but firmly.

Presently he went on:

"The Prince Regent cannot marry you. You have been weak, you have trusted him, you have been foolish, but you are not wicked. Marry me. I will take you away from here. I am rich. I will devote my entire life to making you happy."

"No, no," she replied feebly. He continued, his voice melting in a crescendo of passion and tenderness:

"You do not love me now. I understand that. Marry me, nevertheless. I will win your love. Until I do, we will be as brother and sister. But give me the right to care for you, to protect you, to cherish you. All I ask at present is to serve you, to be near you."

She turned and looked into his impassioned eyes. Oh to be worthy of such love as that! But she felt no emotion save that of pity, and perhaps of gratitude.

"*Herr Adjutant*," she said, "you are talking wildly. You are offering to ruin your entire future for me."

"My future matters nothing," he said hastily. "Your happiness matters everything—your happiness would bring happiness to me. Nothing else can do that. I cannot leave you here—it is all very well at present while the Prince loves you—but you do not realize as well as I, who have seen him discard one woman after another, what it will mean to you when his love grows cold! Believe me, you will be better off as my wife. Do not sacrifice your entire life for the sake of a few more months of delirious happiness. Return to a life of virtue—marry me to-day, to-morrow, next week—but break with the Prince at once."

"I cannot," she said. "I cannot. I love him the way you love me."

"He is unworthy of you, and of such love!" cried von Garde. "Why won't you believe me? He will never marry you, no matter what promises he may have made you. Surely you must realize that by this time?"

She did not answer. She was looking searchingly at the young officer. Her own suffering was completely submerged by her pity for him and her desire and her

determination to save for him what she could out of the wreckage she had made of his life. She spoke very quietly, in a subdued and smooth voice.

"*Herr Adjutant*," she said, "the Prince Regent did not promise to marry me. He gave me the choice of marriage or—of this. I knew what a sacrifice marriage would have involved, and I preferred an unlegalized affair. I went to him with my eyes wide open. He is not to be blamed any more than I."

It wrung her heart to see the look of hopeless inertia that came into his face. Her words had done their work. He buried his face in his hands, and she heard him groan like a man in extreme physical pain. Then, without looking at her again, he went to the door. There he burst forth once more:

"Since you will not marry me, why didn't you have the courage to lie for your own sake? It would have been sweeter for me by far to lie dead and cold with a bullet through my heart, than to carry this defiled image of you about with me. Forgive me," he went on. "I am not angry with you. But I curse Prince Ulrich and his rank! I would give everything I possess—my future, my life, my career, the possibility of winning your love—if our rank were the same, that I might challenge him to a duel and kill him. Good-bye."

His voice was hoarse and broken. He bowed and was gone. But the look of anguish in his face seemed to have remained behind, seemed to have become a tangible thing limned against the rose and gold of the panel in the wall against which his face had been silhouetted.

The inactivity, her thoughts, her memories, her fears, drove her half-mad. Finally, at two o'clock, she could stand the suspense no longer. She ordered her electric

brougham, and set off for the *Neues Palais*, where Ulrich lived. In the hall she met Sylvia.

"You!" exclaimed the Princess. She almost hissed the one word. Then, "Come in here." And she led the way into a small room.

"I do not wish to upbraid you, Alice," she began explosively, "but how could you, how could you admit in public that Ulrich had been lying to save you? Can't you imagine how furious he is? Good heavens, how wretched you look! He is furious, furious."

"Is that why he is angry?" stammered Alice.

"Yes. Oh, what a mess you have made of things! What would one lie more or less have mattered to you? You don't suppose Ulrich would have allowed this duel to come off? He would have sent for von Garde, and explained matters *unter vier Augen*. But to admit the truth publicly—to give Ulrich the lie publicly—it was inexcusable!"

"Where is Ulrich?"

"What do you intend doing?"

"I want to see him. I want to go to him."

"No, Alice, not now. I do not mind telling you that I was so angry with you myself last night that I vowed I would wash my hands of you. But I'll try and help you."

"Thank you," replied Alice calmly. "But please tell me where Ulrich is?"

"No—don't attempt to see him to-day. Let him alone. The men of our family are all notoriously cruel to their women when angry with them, and I think that Ulrich, for all his charming manner and courtliness, can be quite as much of a brute as the rest of them. Come, be sensible. Go home, and don't wait here in the hope of seeing Ulrich."

The girl shook her head.

"I can't. I must see him. You say he is angry. I am so miserable I do not believe I care if he strikes me. I must see him. I think I shall go mad unless I hear his voice. I'll do anything he asks of me in extenuation. I'll humiliate myself. I will beg him to forgive me on my knees. Yes, I will kneel to him."

The Princess looked at the girl curiously. A little disdainful smile hovered about her lips.

"You seem to have gone stark mad," she exclaimed scornfully. "Ask his forgiveness on your knees! Pshaw! You'd have to lick his boots ever after. Don't be a goose, Alice. Go home! Take a sedative, or a hypodermic, and wait till he asks to see you. Then contrive to be ill with a raging headache, and make him wait another twelve hours. That's what you'll do if you have an ounce of common sense left."

"Well, I haven't," Alice retorted. "Please let me see him."

The Princess laughed mockingly.

"You do not imagine he will refuse to see me, do you?" asked Alice.

"I'm afraid he will see you," said the Princess gravely. "He'll anticipate entirely too much pleasure from the torment he will put you through to send you away without seeing you."

Johann evidently was of a different opinion. He seemed to suspect that his Highness would refuse to see any visitor whatsoever, for he refused to announce the Countess, saying diplomatically, with all the suavity of the well-bred European servant, that as it was the Countess's custom to enter unannounced, he saw no necessity for announcing her to-day, unless she particularly desired it.

The Countess did not particularly desire it, so she entered the laboratory very quietly unannounced.

Ulrich was sitting in an arm-chair with his back to the door. She walked rapidly across the long, light, white room, gliding silently over the parquetry flooring. But Ulrich recognized her step. He sprang to his feet.

They faced each other across the high back of the big chair.

"Ulrich!" she exclaimed.

He bowed.

"Countess Gortza, what gives me the pleasure of your visit?"

It was cruel to thrust her thus into an alien zone, but in spite of her misery a thrill of pleasure tingled through every nerve. This was the same inflexible self-possession, the same suave, languorous grace and charm that he had brought to bear upon her in the pre-nuptial days, and which, to this hour, when he chose to enshroud himself in it, never failed to fascinate her.

"Ulrich!" she stammered again.

"Countess, take this chair. I will get another for myself."

He waited for her to be seated, as if they were strangers.

A wild notion seized her to throw herself at his feet then and there and implore his forgiveness. But discretion prevailed. She feared him in this caustic mood more than she would have dreaded any outbreak of anger. He would probably riddle her with sarcasm if she were to kneel to him now. No, decidedly, she must do nothing so crude at the moment.

She sat down limply in the chair which he had placed for her.

"I have come, Ulrich, to ask your forgiveness."

A graceful gesture of his slim, dark, aristocratic hand invited her to proceed. Sylvia was right, she reflected. He would not spare her one jot of any possible torment he could put her through. And how refined, how delicately refined was that torment!

"I did not realize last night when I spoke the truth about myself that it made things rather awkward for you, as you had defended me. All I felt at the moment was that I must speak the truth."

"Then why agitate yourself about the matter subsequently, Countess?"

This studied reiteration of her title was diabolical. She became so nervous that she could barely enunciate.

"I am afraid I have offended you very deeply," she said humbly.

A deprecatory gesture of the eloquent hand, and then the words:

"I do not deny, Countess, that it was unpleasant to be stigmatized as a liar. But chivalry dictates that an offence which would be unpardonable if committed by man, must be condoned in a woman, particularly if she commits the offence in trying to save from fancied death the man she loves—perhaps her lover."

"Ulrich!"

She jumped to her feet, in anger. Her face turned pale. She seemed suddenly transformed. He had not thought that she could become so angry.

"Ulrich," she exclaimed indignantly, "how dare you say such a thing? You know it is not true. It's abominable of you! It's infamous!"

"Infamous is a pretty strong word," he said coldly.

"You know as well as I, that I do not care a fig about von Garde or any other man. I love you—you only."

"That, of course, is very flattering," he replied coolly. From his careless manner she might have been a woman to whom he had addressed the merest compliment some time in the past. A little hard lump gathered in her throat. She swallowed it.

"You've got to take that back, Ulrich," she said, trying to control herself. "It's a gross insult. I won't take it, not even from you, least of all from you."

He arose and made her a ridiculously profound bow. "I humbly apologize," he said, and with a smile seated himself.

"Ulrich, Ulrich," she cried, "don't treat me this way

"I am sorry you find my manner offensive, Countess. If you will point out in what way I am making myself objectionable, I will mend my fault."

It was a splendid bit of acting, but his nerves were beginning to give under the strain and he knew it.

"You are very heartless, Ulrich!"

She walked through the room, and then came back to him. As she approached him, he sprang to his feet in a gesture that was almost defensive. When her eyes met his she saw anxiety in them, and at once she realized her own power over him.

She knew that all she need do was to throw her arms about his neck, to press her lips upon his mouth, to lay her hand on his brow with her fingers, and he would be sobbing and moaning in her arms a moment later. A little more she seemed to coax her, to goad her on: "Down with your reserve, your modesty. If you wish to hold him, the courtesan for once. Subjugate him. Let him feel the warmth of your lips, the throbbing of your heart, the fragrance of your skin, the magic of your eyes. The woman in her rebelled. If she could not resist his anger as one human being speaking to

would not pollute the feeling that had bound them together.

With a little gesture of disdain, of contempt almost, she walked away from him. When she turned and looked at him, he stood with his watch in his hand.

"I am sure, Countess," he said more gently, without looking at her, "that you will pardon me for asking your permission to discontinue this very interesting conversation. I am due at the Clinic in half an hour."

She did not reply, but stood looking at him fixedly. Fear came back in his eyes. It occurred to her that to punish him she might caress him, and having demonstrated her power, seeing him inert and helpless, she might fling back his passion to him as not worth having. But she restrained herself. She would not lower herself. Still she did not reply. He pretended that she had spoken.

"Thank you so much, Countess," he said, and walked to the door.

The fear of losing him sent the blood rushing to her heart. She felt dizzy and ill.

"Ulrich, don't go, don't go——"

He stretched out his hand for the door-knob.

Her dizziness increased.

Perhaps she stumbled over a loose rug; perhaps it was nervousness; perhaps weakness, for she had not touched food that day; perhaps, also, it was the strange desire she had experienced all morning to kneel to him. At any rate, she stumbled forward, and fell at his feet.

"Ulrich, don't go, don't, don't! If you break with me like this it will kill me. After all, what have I done? I have given my honor, my career, everything for you. You yourself would have hated me if I had not spoken the truth. Ulrich——"

His hand was turning the door-knob; he ignored her completely. She became desperate.

"Ulrich, what can I say to soften you? Look at me. My reputation is in tatters, and after all—owing to you. Can you not forgive me for what I have done?"

He opened the door.

A cry of distress came from her lips, like the cry of a hunted creature of the woods making its last stand. She pitched forward face down. She heard the door close and believed he had gone.

When he lifted her from the floor she lay in his arms in a dead faint. Ten minutes elapsed before he was able to revive her.

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CHAPTER XXII

Von Garde had, of course, requested that his immediate resignation be accepted. A week later he had himself transferred to a different regiment. Neither Ulrich nor Alice saw him before he left. He called on Sylvia, and as she happened to be out, he left his card with "*p. p. c.*" scribbled in the corner. He made no further effort to see her.

Once more Ulrich and Alice were lovers. If his capacity for refined cruelty was great, his capacity for tenderness was practically unlimited, and he made her ample amends for the heart-breaking torture to which he had put her.

He sent Egon daily to see her. The carriage with the beautiful jet-black horses and the lackeys in the royal liveries—the yellow plush liveries which she so much admired—waited for hours outside her door, and the child King sat within his toy-room, and played at her feet, while she embroidered or read, or entertained some friend. Ulrich wished to proclaim to the entire little world at Hohen that the one pure affection of his life, his love for little Egon, was shared by his mistress.

One morning he brought Egon to Alice's apartment for breakfast. She saw immediately that something was wrong, as the two entered.

"Countess Gortza," said Ulrich, standing behind Egon, and giving Alice a significant wink, "I am afraid I am going to inconvenience you. When I asked your permission last week to bring my little cousin this morning, I thought

we would have a pleasant, informal, cosy little breakfast. But it is my duty to tell you that his Majesty, the King, desires to be treated with due ceremony."

Tears came to Egon's eyes. He stamped his foot in impotent rage.

"I don't want you to talk to me like that, Cousin Ulrich," he cried.

"Did I misinterpret your Majesty's instructions?" asked Ulrich innocently.

Poor little Egon began bawling ingloriously. The royal fists were rubbed quite vulgarly into the royal eyes to wipe away the inundation of tears. He looked very ridiculous. Running across the room, he threw himself, sobbing, upon a couch.

"I am sorry to have to rebuke your Majesty," said Ulrich, with another wink at Alice, "but it is considered very bad form for a gentleman, though he is a crowned head, to lie down in the presence of a lady."

"I don't care if it is," blubbered Egon, his nose very red, and his round little face drenched with tears.

"You see, Countess," continued Ulrich, "the King this morning threw his hairbrush at his valet, because the man did not address him to his liking. Later, his Majesty explained to me that it was time to impress everyone with the fact that he is King. I am doing so."

Egon attempted to protest. But he was crying quite too vigorously to enunciate any intelligible words. A confused jumble of disjointed syllables came from his mouth. Alice signified to Ulrich to withdraw.

Left alone with the little boy, she took him on her lap, and soothed him.

"Don't you think, dear, that Cousin Ulrich knows best how you are to be addressed?" she said. "I think you can safely trust him."

"Do you trust him?"

"Implicitly."

Egon considered this. "Of course I trust him," he said.

"Then I should think you would try to obey him."

"But I am the King."

"Yes, dear, you are the King. But if you were always to be treated as a king, you would not like it at all."

"Yes, I should."

"You didn't like it just now when Cousin Ulrich treated you ceremoniously. And if I were to treat you like a king, I couldn't possibly take you on my lap, and kiss you, and hug you, and call you my own, dear little lad."

He pondered over that a little while. Then he said:

"Please don't you ever treat me differently. But I don't see why I should have to obey everyone, even Cousin Ulrich."

"Because we all must learn to obey before we can command. Because you are only a little boy. If your grandfather were still living, your rank would be exactly the same as your cousin's. And then, Egon, you must remember that Cousin Ulrich is a great man, and would be even if he were not of royal rank. It is doubtful, dear, whether you will ever be as competent as Cousin Ulrich. Furthermore, when we trust people, the way you and I trust Cousin Ulrich, we must sometimes do blindly what they wish, knowing that they know better than we ourselves what is good for us."

The little boy turned on Alice's lap, and regarded her contemptively.

"Dear Miss Schatzie," he said, in the winning von Dette way, "tell me, did you ever do anything Cousin

Ulrich wanted you to do blindly, without questioning, just because you trusted him?"

"Yes, dear."

"And you've never been sorry."

"Never."

The lad got to his feet.

"I guess," he said, "I will go and apologize to Cousin Ulrich."

Within ten minutes Egon was rioting in buckwheat cakes and hot muffins, luxuries he was not allowed at home. He had forgotten his woes. He had had two muffins, and asked Ulrich whether he might have a third.

"Ask the Countess. She knows what is good for little boys better than I. She is a trained nurse."

Alice helped him to a muffin, and Egon said sagely:

"Oh, yes, that is why grandfather gave her a title, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Ulrich briefly.

"If grandfather hadn't, could I have given her a title during my minority?"

"No," said Ulrich. "But you could have asked me, as Prince Regent, to give it to her, and I would have done it."

"I guess I wouldn't have had to ask you," commented Egon coolly. "I think you are just as fond of her as I am."

Alice flushed painfully. She exchanged a swift glance with Ulrich. He shrugged his shoulders. A moment later Egon said:

"Oh, it is just lovely to have breakfast like this, sitting between you, dear Countess Gortza, and Cousin Ulrich. It makes me feel as if I had really and truly a father and mother."

He jumped from his chair, and ran toward Alice to be kissed. She wiped his mouth, sticky with honey. Above the child's shoulder her eyes and Ulrich's met. Her lips trembled. The same thought came to them both.

Prior to the ball which had ended so disastrously for her, Alice had issued invitations for a reception to be held in one of the ball-rooms of her hotel about a fortnight later.

Ulrich wondered whether she would have the courage to stand up and receive the two hundred odd persons she had invited, and bear the brunt of their malice or compassion, or whether she would feign an indisposition, and have the invitations recalled at the last moment. As she consulted him about good form in floral decorations at such affairs, he discreetly abstained from asking questions.

It was well past ten o'clock when he entered the hall where Alice, with Sylvia near her, was receiving.

There was a mob of people about them, and he did not approach her at once, but stood watching her. Again she gave him the sensation of being a stranger, a woman whom he had barely spoken to. What was the secret of her charm and of her power?

Certainly her manner was perfect. A woman born and bred in this sophisticated society could not have been more at her ease. There was a touch of deference in her manner, as she spoke to the elder women, that was admirable, and in addressing the elderly men she employed a manner of hesitating coquetry.

The younger men—they were swarming about her—she treated distantly, aloofly.

Ulrich made his way through the crush of people, bowed over her hand, kissed it, spoke a few perfunctory words and passed on. But he remained near her. Her

society manner fascinated him. It was so like and so unlike her. Like her, in that she retained her spontaneity and charm; unlike her, in that her manner, without conveying coldness, lacked every vestige of cordiality. He saw and marvelled.

Some officers grouped themselves about him, but his silence prohibited loquacity on their part, and one by one they fell away.

A Fraeulein von Achtlingen sidled up to Alice. She had just arrived. She was a withered, faded woman of forty-five or older, unnaturally lean and tall, her skin wrinkled and cracked like dry earth. She limped and was cross-eyed. All in all, a repulsive-looking creature, and her physical infirmities, which ordinarily would have earned her a charitable compassion, had failed to soften anyone toward her, for her malice was as great as her unattractiveness.

Alice greeted her, and von Achtlingen lisped in a voice loud enough to be heard by a number of persons who stood near:

"Dear Countess, I was grieved for you the other evening. Such a misfortune! To have your name linked with the Prince Regent's!"

"Would it have been such a misfortune for you?" retorted Alice.

The men who stood near, laughed. Ulrich with difficulty repressed a smile. Her self-possession was superb. He moved away, sat down at a distance from her in an alcove where he was partially screened from view, but where he could see her.

He remembered that he had once, long ago, in thinking of her and of the ever newness of her personality, compared her to Shakespeare's Cleopatra, "Age cannot stale or custom wither her." He had then thought her de-

ficient in magnificence and splendor. How she had developed since then!

Surely no woman could be more magnificent than she was to-night. She seemed to be invested with a veritable halo of splendor. Her gown, too, was more *décolleté* than ever before. But this was not displeasing to him.

He remembered that the first time he had seen her she had appeared to him to be dipped in snow. Now her cheeks were tinged with a delicious, shell pink. He had thought that first day, that her beauty was almost too fragile to wear well. He had believed that in a few years she would droop and fade and become insignificant. He had not believed that in her veins bounded sufficient passion to preserve her beauty.

How mistaken he had been! She was more beautiful to-night than he had ever seen her. Five years hence she would be more exquisite still, more seductive, more regal, more alluring. Alluring! His blood became accelerated. Exhilaration swept over him. There was no doubt of it. Five years hence, perhaps six or seven years hence, she would be at her best, her magnificence would become proverbial. And yet she was perfect now. How could perfection be bettered? He did not know. He only knew that she had developed along entirely different lines than he had anticipated, that she would expand more and more.

He became vaguely uneasy. She had told him that he eclipsed all other men for her. Doubtless she believed that to be true. Perhaps it was true, at present. But would it be true always? Would she remain indifferent to all other men perpetually?

What troubled him was how the situation veered and shifted from under his feet. He was certain of her honesty and of her love, but he was by no means certain of

her. Would there not come a time when another would replace him?

He watched her narrowly. She seemed not only completely at ease, she seemed to be deriving a certain enjoyment from being the cynosure of all eyes, the centre of gravity about which everybody, especially the men, revolved.

A number of artists, whom he himself had introduced to her upon some informal occasion, seemed to have formed a permanent coterie about her. Other men and women moved on, but this handful of artists remained her stable satellites. And they were the wittiest, and most clever and attractive men in the room.

He forced himself to go and speak to her. The others moved away. No more guests were expected, and she and he sat down together. The satellites moved on a few steps, halted and waited.

"Vampires," thought Ulrich. "Jackals! Waiting for me to leave her. Let them wait."

"You seem very taciturn to-night, Ulrich," she said. "Anything wrong?"

One of the satellites, Bouchère, a painter of whom great things were expected, overheard her call Ulrich by his Christian name. The young fellow changed color, a strange light kindled in his eyes. His lips were agitated as if with envy. Ulrich pitied him.

"A little preoccupied, that is all," he replied distantly.

"With plague specimens?" she teased.

"Not with plague, but with plaguey specimens," he said. She laughed.

"Man or woman?"

"Man, of course. Our own sex is always the most interesting to us, is it not?" he retorted with withering sarcasm.

She laughed derisively.

"Only when we pay someone the compliment of being jealous of him, or her."

Her laugh troubled him. There was in it something of triumph and of exultation. She seemed like a woman who for the first time has tasted of the delight of knowing that she had power over men.

"May I get you something to drink—or a sherbet?" he asked.

"Thank you, no. But you may get yourself something, and come back here and eat it."

He shrugged his shoulders and looked down at her. His figure, he was standing before her, shielded her face from the room. An instantaneous change came over her face. The strangeness dropped from her. She was the woman he loved, the woman with whom he was intimate, the one woman in the world for him.

Without pronouncing the words, her lips framed the question:

"Are you coming to-night?"

"Yes."

He bowed and walked away. He felt pacified, at ease, satisfied. He sought out a number of women, and made himself agreeable. He sparkled, he shone. He wished to give tone and brilliancy to her first large affair, and to please her, he exerted himself more than usual.

Having done his duty as a quasi-host, he sought an opportunity of again observing her. The satellites had left her, all but Bouchère, and he and she were conversing with considerable animation. Bouchère was a man of about twenty-eight. His features were classically beautiful, his hair and eyes were a soft brown and shot through and through with glints of gold. His ivory-white hands were slim and graceful, and he moved them

incessantly, either from a desire to display them or from nervousness. He had a boyish air which endeared him to women. Like all Frenchmen, he was a clever talker, and could tell a *risqué* story without allowing it to degenerate into indelicacy.

Bouchère was considered a painter of great promise. After studying in Paris, he had come to spend a winter in the Royal Art School of Hohen. It was he who had written the following impertinence to a friend: "Paris can teach me no more, nor can Spain. From the Barbizon School, from Sarolla y Bastida, and all the rest, I have gleaned all I can ever glean of technical perfection in impressionism. Now I am going to Germany, for Germany, so sublimely preëminent in music, so dominant in science, so respectably mediocre in letters, has produced only the most commonplace and incomparably unoriginal painters in modern times, and I anticipate that I shall learn as much from studying the mistakes of the blundering, uninspired Teutons as from gloating over the masterpieces of the transcendent Frenchmen and the temperamental Spaniards."

Bouchère was speaking and Alice was listening. She smiled. Her teeth shone like the moist petals of the water-lily. Once she closed her eyes, and when she opened them again, she shook her head lightly at Bouchère with an air of innocent familiarity, as if rebuking him. Ulrich had never seen her employ the gesture to anyone excepting himself, and she used it only when restraining his too vehement ardor.

What story, in heaven's name, was Bouchère telling her? And such stories as Bouchère was capable of! He remembered one in particular. . . He felt an almost uncontrollable desire to walk up to them and snatch Alice

away from the passionate eyes of the artist, and cry out, "This woman belongs to me, to me."

All the brutality of the predatory male was aroused in him. He was in torment. In imagination he painted the future. Would he be able to hold her? Would he lose her? Until recently he had believed that the misery of miseries for a man was to be unable to win and possess the woman whom he loved. But now it appeared there was a greater infelicity,—to lose a woman one has possessed and whom one continues to adore.

The fame of her beauty would spread. She was one of those rare women whose beauty alone is bound to make them famous,—or infamous. There were at least half a dozen men in Europe, whom he knew, who, once the rumor of her beauty began to spread, would make it their business to see her, to be introduced to her, to look her over leisurely, as a man looks over a valuable painting or house which he contemplates acquiring. He himself had regarded her in that light at first. And each of these men was wealthy. A few of them were multimillionaires, and their millions were backed with titles quite as old, even if less dazzling than his own. He could make her comfortable, keep her in luxury in a small way, but he could not afford to spend more than two hundred and fifty thousand marks annually on her establishment,—perhaps, if some speculations turned out well, half a million of marks. And some of those hypothetical men were able to spend on her as many pounds sterling a year, if they pleased.

She loved jewelry. He remembered the necklace and lavalrière he had bought her in Italy. He had not believed that she would accept them, knowing her scruples; but when he had shown them to her, a singular flush of

joy had come into her face, and she had exclaimed, "I ought not to, but I cannot refuse these pearls. They are so beautiful."

It had pleased him at the time, but now the recollection of the episode tortured him. Other men would be able to buy her so much more than he could. And some of them were attractive, very.

There was Archduke Boris, with his fortune and his personality, his luminous vivacity and barbaric splendor and passion. He would squander a fortune upon her in bonbons and jewelry in the vagrant hope of winning her.

There was the Count von Hellersberg, of Austria, who had eloped with the Duchess Dufriche, who had died within a year, a suicide, it was rumored, because she could not endure being cut by all Europe. He was as dashing and handsome a blackguard as ever lived. He was fabulously rich, and combined the elegance of the Parisian with the facile sentimentality of the German, and had in the bargain all the peculiar *chic* of the Austrian,—*schneidig*, as it is termed.

There was Hernshawe, who would some day be the Duke of Luxbridge. There were half a dozen others.

He tormented himself by enumerating them, one by one. Finally, worn out, sick at heart, cursing himself and his insane jealousy, he bade her a perfunctory adieu, and leaving by the lobby of the house, walked around the corner and let himself in at the side door with a latch key. The maid asked him where he would wait. He requested her to light the gas in the library.

But it was impossible to read. Assured that the girl was not there, he went to Alice's sleeping room. He went through all the unspeakable torment of a man who has actually lost the woman he loves. He picked up her bedroom slippers, touched her night-gown, smoothed the

pillow which her face had pressed, pressed her hairbrush against his own head.

What should he do? Marry her? Then he would be sure of her. They would be comparatively poor. Eminent though he was as a physician, it would take him several years to build up a lucrative practice. In combating poverty, she would be drawn more closely to him. They would have children, and the great joy of becoming a mother and of looking after her little brood would amply compensate her for the altered social condition. Finery and clothes would become a negligible quantity.

But in spite of his actual suffering, the idea of marriage remained repugnant to him. He hated the idea of losing his rank. His subterfuge, of course, was what he must do for Egon, and for the kingdom. But he knew very well that Gunther, young as he was, was no fool, and that if forced to put his shoulder to the wheel of the chariot of state, he would probably acquit himself very creditably. And so he was in reality cheating himself in using this flimsy pretext to cover his own selfishness.

He had overheard some man refer to her that evening as "La Gortza." That, too, made him miserable. La Pompadour, La Querouaille, La DuBarry, La Vallière. La Gortza! Yes, her beauty would make her famous—or infamous.

Until now he had always held the whip hand with women; with Alice, too, much as he loved her, he had until now controlled the situation. But he felt that it was quite possible that that situation might become reversed. He began to understand how a man can ruin himself for a woman, ruin himself financially, morally, mentally.

She came in at last. He had gone back to the library, and her pale green silk evening coat, lined with swans-

down, brushed across his hand as she stopped and kissed his cheek.

"I have kept you waiting an unconscionable time—I thought Bouchère would never go."

She kissed him again, more fervently.

She sat down opposite him, and took his hand in hers.

"Dearest," she said in a coaxing, intimate way. Her cloak fell back, revealing the dazzling shoulders. "Were you satisfied with me? Didn't I behave beautifully? Please praise me, Ulrich darling, I tried so hard to behave just as I thought you would wish me too."

"You seemed to enjoy doing it quite uncommonly," he retorted, none too graciously.

She laughed.

"Ulrich, dear, do you know, until this morning I dreaded this affair horribly. I thought I would suffocate with shame—you understand. Then suddenly to-night, as I stood there, a different mood came over me and I felt so stupidly, idiotically, gloriously happy that I was rid of the lie. I felt that I didn't care a fig about anybody's opinion of me. Ulrich, I love you a thousand times better every day."

"Alice!"

They arose of one accord, and their lips met. He was seized with a violent desire to hold her close to him.

"Let me kiss your throat," he demanded.

"No, no, Ulrich."

She shrank back. It seemed to her indelicate, indecorous, even, that he should wish to kiss her so intimately while she still wore the gown in which she had been seen and inspected by hundreds of all eyes all evening. She desired to first change her ball gown for a negligée, for

some dressing gown, in which he alone among men, was permitted to see her.

He implored and entreated.

"Dearest, don't refuse me, I am mad for you, mad, quite mad."

She resisted another moment, then, seeing the anguish in his eyes, yielded him her neck. She had been so full of her little triumph, she was so elated at having finally overcome her sense of shame, she had wanted so much to hear a word of praise from him.

His lips were becoming bolder. She felt the pressure of his sharp teeth against her tender skin. She became frightened.

"No, please, dearest; don't, don't."

"I had better go," he said. "I am not fit to remain with you to-night."

"No, you are not going. Not in this mood. What is the matter?"

"Nothing, let me go."

She barred the way.

That sobered him. He sat down before the gas log fire. She left the room. When she returned a few moments later, she was in a dressing gown.

"It is three o'clock," she said in a casual voice. "Do you want something to eat?"

He did not answer, and she rumbled her fingers through his hair.

"Ulrich, will you have some sandwiches to eat?"

"Sandwiches!"

"Are the cannibalistic tendencies still uppermost?"

He forced a laugh. She turned him about, and sat down on his knee.

"You dear, stupid thing," she said. "What is the matter with you?" she began kissing him, using every

caress that she knew he loved. But her kisses were an added torment. Was she kissing him as her lips touched his face, his eyes, his mouth, or was she kissing some other man?

He pushed her away.

"Don't, Alice, don't; let me alone."

She got to her feet, and stood before him. He buried his face in his hands. Suddenly she divined the truth.

"Ulrich," she said, "you are jealous. Now poor von Garde is gone, will you kindly tell me of whom you are jealous?"

He did not reply.

"Ulrich, dear, how can you be so abysmally silly?"

He lifted his face.

"Alice, we had better get married."

"So that you secure a legal title to me?" She was furious. "Thank you." She walked from the room and he saw her kick a sofa pillow viciously that had fallen from a chair.

"I mean it, Alice," he called after her.

"Look here, Ulrich," she stood in the doorway, "I have no desire to listen to nonsense at this time of the morning. I am dead tired. I had a fatiguing evening, and I want to go to bed."

"Alice, I am serious. I want you to marry me."

For a moment she held her breath, and stood stock-still. At last he had spoken the words which she had longed to hear so earnestly; he had spoken them passionately, with lover-like insistence. Surely she was too fastidious in demanding more than all that after what had passed between them. But she knew that she would despise herself if she accepted his offer knowing that jealousy alone had prompted it.

"I have told you before," she said acidly, "that I am

very tired. And I will not marry you because you want to make a chattel of me. And if you have an unconquerable desire for an argument, I must request you to ring up some scientific friend and argue with him."

Her manner amazed him. He assumed an imperious air, but it did not awe her in the least, as he had intended it should. She smiled. She looked him over in a worldly-wise, superior way that she sometimes used to advantage in curbing him. He became frantic with mortification and passion and jealousy.

"I insist on your coming back and listening to me," he cried, stamping his foot. Alice laughed. She remembered the scene she had gone through with Egon a few days before.

"You shan't laugh at me," he rasped.

"I will laugh at you, and I won't listen to you," and she ran away. He followed. She was too quick for him, and she reached her dressing room, closed it and shot the bolt before he got there. Her sleeping room adjoined the dressing room on the other side. He was effectually shut off from her unless she unbolted the door.

"Alice, open the door," he commanded.

"Ulrich, I am going to bed. Good-night, dear. I hope you will enjoy your discussion, that is, if anyone will listen to you at this hour."

"Alice, dear, *please* open the door."

"Ah, that's a little better. Now listen to what I have to say to you, Ulrich. It is the first time I have barred you from my room. I am fearfully tired, and with all due respect for you, dear, I know that when you get to arguing a point you'll keep at it for a good hour. Now are you going to argue, or aren't you? I, for one, am going right to bed. Ulrich, dear, I blush to say it, but the door effectually screens my blushes, I am shockingly

in love with you to-night. Ulrich, dear," she added in a coaxing, wheedling tone, "aren't you a wee little bit in love with me to-night?"

"Good God!" he burst forth, "unless you open that door I'll break it. I don't care how much noise I make. I don't care if I arouse the entire house. I don't care if the police forces its way in here to see what's wrong. I'll get a fire-axe and I'll smash that d—d door."

"Don't be profane, dearie. And I beg to remind you, you'll have to smash another door after you get through with the first one."

"Alice, you're a devil!"

"And you'll be so horribly tired after smashing two strong, oak doors. I believe there are iron rivets in them, too, Ulrich."

"Alice, you are driving me crazy! Open that door, let me in, please, dearest, please."

"Ulrich, dear, what do you want to do,—to convince me that I must marry you, or—to love me?"

"Either, neither, both, anything you wish, nothing you do not wish, only open the door."

She unbolted the door; it swung open.

"You poor thing," she said, "and you're still dressed."

"You—you devil!" he spluttered.

Laughing, she ran to her room, and crept into bed. When he entered the apartment a few moments later, she pretended to be asleep. She gurgled softly, as if snoring.

He knelt down on the bed, and kissed her.

"You devil," he said, "you beautiful, beautiful devil!"

"Is that your latest name for your little Puritan?"

"You're both." He smothered her in kisses. "You're both. God!—you have bewitched me!"

CHAPTER XXIII

They resumed their quest for a villa the end of March. Spring came early that year. The pussy willows with their grey velvet hoods sprinkled with gold dust, the crocus, the daffodils, which bloomed in every narrow strip of garden in Hohe, the sweet, young tips on the pine trees, engendered a desire in Alice for a house with a fair-sized garden.

Sylvia had pointed out a substantial-looking, old-fashioned mansion with a Colonial front, one day, which had been vacant for some time.

"Baroness von Sylka occupied it for years," said Sylvia. "It is a very handsomely finished house, there is a pretty little walled-in garden back of the house, and all in all, I think it ought to suit you."

"I hate the idea of a big, rambling house," said Alice. "But Ulrich insists. He won't be happy unless I have an establishment big enough to assemble the entire Court in if needs must be."

"For once Ulrich is right. Giving you a big establishment is the only way in which Ulrich can give you a position, and make everybody understand that you're a factor in this State. Not the biggest man in the kingdom, not that odious General von Ruegen even, but will kow-tow to you once you're mistress of a big mansion."

"I don't think General von Ruegen so odious at all," said Alice. She remembered his kindness on the evening of the von Garde affair.

The next afternoon, as Alice and Ulrich motored off on a house-hunting quest, she said:

"Ulrich, there is a house in the *Museenstrasse* which Sylvia called my attention to. It seems to be very nice. Unless it's too dear."

"Which house?"

"A Baroness von Sylka, I believe, occupied it for years."

"What?" Ulrich flared up. "How can Sylvia dare suggest that house for you. Don't you know that Sylka woman was Uncle Joachim's mistress for years? She didn't have a vestige of self-respect left."

Alice crimsoned.

"That's rather a brutal thing to say to me," she remarked diffidently.

"How so? You cannot misunderstand me? I see you do." He laughed. "My dear child," he said, "in spite of all, you are what you always were, a little Puritan."

"I confess, I don't understand."

"Uncle Joachim was rotten, my dear, rotten to the core, and a woman who—oh, hang it! I want you to understand, and still I am glad you do not understand."

"Very well," she said meekly. But her thoughts kept reverting to his cryptic remarks.

"Let's drop the subject," he suggested. "I have a list of houses here, but I do not think any of them will do. Let's run up to Banker Seligmann's daughter's place once more—it's almost finished, and I have a permit so we can get in and look around."

"Ulrich, dear, I am not covetous as a rule. But I don't want to look at that place again. It turns me green with envy. It is so gorgeously lovely."

Ulrich laughed, and, in spite of Alice's protestations, had the chauffeur run the automobile up to the beautiful mansion. Its location was ideal. It was situated on a bluff overlooking the river, which in summer swarmed

with yachts, launches, canoes and similar small craft. It was built of grey stone. An enormous semicircular veranda, colonnaded, and flanked by delightfully easy stairs, fronted the river. A bronze railing extended from the last pillar of the colonnade to the enormous conservatory, ran around it, and terminated beyond at the porte cochère. There were twenty-four sleeping rooms in the house, a small dining-room, a large dining-room, two kitchens, and library, music-room, a small drawing-room, a reception room, and two small ante-chambers. The dining-rooms were wainscoted in oak alternating with mahogany, both woods set in heavily carved black walnut frames.

"Come away, Ulrich. It is too magnificent. I don't want to see the bedrooms," said Alice, petulantly.

"Don't be foolish, dear." He led the way upstairs to a small, exquisitely appointed room that faced the East. The walls were unpapered, but the mantel, of sculptured alabaster, had been set. The woodwork was bird's-eye maple, and the ceiling was frescoed.

Alice uttered an ejaculation of esthetic joy.

"So you like the house?"

"It's a dream."

"I think I can get the dream for you."

"No, no, the rental would be preposterous.

"I think I can get it at a comparatively low figure. Seligmann's daughter, for whom the house was built as a wedding gift, will have to go to South America with her husband, contrary to expectations. That leaves the house on Seligmann's hands, and I think he will let me have it for you."

"It will cost too much. Think of the grounds! It would require at least two gardeners."

"Six gardeners, my love."

"Then it is out of the question."

"No, it is not. I made a cool little sum on the *Boeræ*."

"You never told me."

"I wanted to surprise you with this house."

Still she interposed objections.

He took her by the hand, and led her to the window-seat. They sat down together, as if for a long talk.

"Old Seligmann is anxious, oh, so anxious, for an order or a title. I think I shall confer upon him the Order of the Knights of Bouillon. And I am sure, dear, when I ask him what the rental is to be, it will be right."

Alice was horrified.

"In America," she said, "we would call that graft."

"You forget, my love," laughed Ulrich, "*J'état, c'est moi*."

But she would not take his view of it.

"He's not really entitled to the Order, is he?" she asked. Suddenly she added, "Any more than I am to my title."

"Come, dear," he said, "I think we might give the old man the Order, just to please him, you know."

She looked about the beautiful room and weakened.

"It wouldn't injure a soul," he said, "his being a Knight of Bouillon."

Alice sighed.

"At home," she said, "I believe they distinguish between dishonest graft, which injures someone, and honest graft, by which no one loses. What you propose is honest graft, I suppose."

"Then," said Ulrich, "old Seligmann gets the Order?"

She said abruptly:

"Ulrich, I don't want you to think me foolish, but I would rather not have the house, if you have to pay for it in that way."

He laughed.

"New England conscience at work again? Very well. Old Seligmann shall not get his Order."

"Ulrich, I know I am very trying to-day. The truth is, dearest, I am so very much afraid that you will get yourself into financial difficulties if you take this house. Perhaps you do not know what it means to be in financial distress. I do. And I do not suppose it matters whether it is five marks or five hundred marks or five thousand marks that one cannot pay—so long as one cannot pay. It would kill me, dearest, to think that you should ever have to worry yourself about debts through my fault. You see, dearest, what makes for happiness is not wealth or beautiful environments, but contentment, sweet thoughts, peace of mind, and love."

She had spoken hesitatingly, the color coming and going on her face. He could see how difficult it had been for her to get through with her little peroration.

"Dearest," he said tenderly. "I can afford it. I made not merely a neat little sum, as I told you before, but quite a handsome little fortune, on the *Boerse*, through old Seligmann's good offices."

"Old Seligmann again."

"Yes, and once more. You know how worried I have been about the insufficiency of the school fund. Well, old Seligmann worked out a plan for me for raising the money—all we need and more—for the schools."

"Goodness gracious," said Alice, "isn't that the sort of 'service to the State' men get orders for?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you tell me that at once?"

"Because it gives me such pleasure to see you work so faithfully and hard trying to keep in good moral trim that wicked man, your lover."

"Ulrich! And then we can have the house!"

"Surely."

"Oh, I am so glad."

Suddenly a shadow crossed her face.

"What is it, dear?"

"I wonder if I will be able to live up to all my duties as mistress of this mansion and to you?"

"Duties?" He was infinitely amused.

"Alice, do you actually consider that you have 'duties' toward me?"

"Why not? Haven't you assumed certain obligations?"

"Have I?" Until recently you refused to recognize any obligation on my part."

"You are referring to financial obligations. I do not recognize any monetary obligation on your part, Ulrich."

"What then?"

She smoothed the beautiful muff of grey fox which she was carrying with great particularity. Without looking at him, she said:

"I expect you to be faithful to me."

He looked at her in amazement.

"You do not suppose, do you, that I have been unfaithful?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. I hope not. If I were ever to learn that you have been unfaithful to me, I would break with you at once. It is just as well that you know."

"That sounds almost as if you suspected me—Alice, look at me. What put such notions into your head, child?"

"Child!" she laughed. "Child!"

"Alice, you are thinking of some particular woman. Whom?"

"Baroness von Hess."

The blood rushed to his face.

"You know?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Last year. . . "

"Exactly, Alice. Last year. It is ancient history by this time. It was—oh, you wouldn't understand at any rate."

"I am not an idiot," she protested. "There is no reason why I shouldn't understand."

"There is, Alice. You are sweet and pure and good, and for that reason you will never be able to understand that love, which to you is so serious a thing, so holy a thing even, may be regarded in the light of the merest amusement, to kill ennui."

"I have been told so before," she said.

"By whom, pray?"

"Baroness Hess herself told me the same story."

"That at least should vouch for my veracity. Do I understand that you and Baroness Hess discussed me?"

"Not exactly discussed. I mistrusted her. She was very kind to me on one occasion. I do not quite trust her even now."

"You can safely trust her. She has excellent traits, and she can be a loyal and devoted friend. By all means, allow her to be your friend. She may be very useful to you, and she is very popular in Court circles. Cultivate her."

"Ulrich, I wonder if you will ever discuss me in such a hatefully impersonal way with another woman?"

After a moment's hesitation, he replied:

"Allow me to employ a homely simile that you once used. There are lapdogs, fluffy little creatures, so spoiled and ill-natured that they alternately whimper to be

caressed or snap and snarl if the caress is ill-timed. These toy-dogs must have chicken consommé for dinner and lie on down pillows and coverlids of velvet or silk. They must have a maid to comb and brush and curry them, a footman to carry them to the park and give them the air, for if they were to walk they would take cold in winter and in summer overheat themselves. They are fair weather friends. Deprive them of their chicken broth and their little velvet jackets, their combs and brushes and their footmen, and they will turn into insufferable nuisances. There is another sort of dog, a dog with humid, human eyes, who, given a pool of water, will bathe himself and run about in the sun until he is dry. He will eat hard tack and sleep under a coarse blanket on a deal floor, if need be. He does not whine for a caress, but now and then softly nozzles one's hand, to show that he is there, and if one is in trouble or in grief, he will divine it and will show his affection in a hundred unobtrusive ways. One does not part with such a friend. One keeps and cherishes him."

She came and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Ulrich, dear," she said, "I am going to make a resolution, and I want you to make the same resolution. In future we will not be jealous of each other. We will trust each other."

"I have trusted you always."

"But you have been jealous, Ulrich, so jealous."

"Lately, yes."

"Why? Of whom?"

"Of no one in particular. I cannot explain. I have such a horror of losing you."

"So that was the reason you wanted me to marry you the other evening?"

"Yes."

"Ulrich, I faithfully promise you that I will remain with you—be your very own, so long as you wish it. I consider this promise as binding as any vow cemented by church ritual or civic document."

"And I will make you the same——"

She closed his mouth with a kiss before he could finish.

"Don't spoil matters," she cried. "You must make me no promise of any sort."

"It is not fair to you," he protested. "You are making me sure of yourself, and exact no bond in return."

She laughed mischievously. Again the enchanting change of mood in her had taken place that so delighted him.

"Perhaps," she teased, "I feel more sure of you without the bond."

He looked at her in surprise. Had she read his character as well as all that?

"You see, dear," she said coaxingly, "we are different, you and I. I—slavish creature that I am—love to feel the chains of my master upon me. You, dear, would resent even the thinnest circlet of gold that would be emblematic of my hold upon you."

She made a gesture with her one hand, circling it about the finger on which the marriage ring is worn.

"Come, Ulrich, let us go. The day is beautiful, and we have not spent an entire afternoon together for months."

"Then we will take the house, yes? I was afraid you would not want a new house, no matter how beautiful. I thought you might prefer a house with associations—of children——"

"You are more sentimental than I, Ulrich. Besides, the house has associations—this afternoon has given it memories of ourselves."

CHAPTER XXIV

They bought the rugs and the furniture for the bedrooms in Hohen and in Paris. For the appointments of the lower floor, they intended going to London. Christy had advertised a large sale of old French and English furniture, and Ulrich was very keen about furnishing the large entrance hall in old English style. She feigned an enthusiasm for this fashion consequently which she was far from feeling. She herself would have preferred to have the entire lower portion of the house furnished in Louis XVI style, which to her seemed ideal. The severe lines of Sheraton, the classic simplicity of Adam, the hybrid grace of Hepplewhite and Chippendale were an annoyance to a temperament as warmly malleable and flexible as her own, while the ornate voluptuousness of the Louis Quinze period offended her taste of decorum. But the Louis Seize style satisfied her. She loved its modified restraint, the piquancy of its abbreviated lines, of its quickly terminating curves.

At the outset she had known very little of all these differences. But on hearing Ulrich comment upon this and that style of furniture, she had supplied herself with every available book on the subject—German, French, English, and had industriously applied herself to assimilating their contents. She was surprised when she finished, to discover the fondnesses and the dislikes which she had developed for perfectly inoffensive pieces of furniture. She meant to surprise Ulrich when they got to

London with her intimate acquaintance of one of his hobbies.

Ulrich desired to furnish the bird's-eye maple room for her as a surprise. She consented to this, of course, and he took her over to the mansion to have a look at the completed room.

She was delighted with it. He had had the ceilings repainted. Instead of the frescoes of plump, clumsy Cupids hovering about a somewhat buxom Venus, he had had Avissé, a friend of Bouchère, substitute a flower-piece, pink and white roses and white and purple lilacs trailing about circularly. Avissé, who was later to achieve a reputation as a flower painter as great as Longpré, had also painted the panels in the room to match the ceiling, which were sunk into the walls, the frames of the panels being pale blue damask edged with gilt and held by narrow rims of bird's-eye maple. Above the mantel was a long, narrow panel which Ulrich had secured from Longpré himself. It was a trifle more incisive, more vigorous than the younger painter's work, and Ulrich, in pointing this out to Alice, praised the younger man's modesty in softening his own tones. The chairs were upholstered in pale blue damask flowered with pink and white roses, and there were a few precise, prim little cane-bottomed chairs that had tiny cushions of the same damask tied to their backs.

It had been difficult to secure a rug to suitably complete the color scheme of the room. Ulrich had at first chosen an old Polish rug, for which he had paid forty-six thousand francs. Its cool green shades, the bold blending of rose-tints and greens that were verdant as a lawn after an April rain, delighted and surprised him, and it had seemed to be the very rug to set off Avissé's beautiful work effectually. But when it lay in the room its verdure

appeared crude and the audacity of its coloring seemed vulgar and gross. He then procured the option on a light-tinted Persian rug. But it seemed faded and musty and sepulchral beside the smart brightness, the virginal sweetness of the little boudoir. Finally he got Avisse to design a rug which he had made in the goblin and tapestry factories of France, and the result was satisfactory.

She was charmed with the apartment. She thanked him again and again. The dainty little room which he had fitted up for her with such loving forethought, seemed to epitomize all that was tender and reverential in his feeling for her. The sense of sin had recently been growing weaker and weaker in her, and as she stood there, she suddenly found herself saying, "There is nothing sinful in our relation, nothing."

The same evening they went to London. They stopped at the Savoy. They had travelled without valet or maid, and they took a suite of three rooms only, bath, bedroom and a little sitting room. They registered as Dr. von Dette and wife.

As she watched him write the names, she experienced a curious sensation. She seemed to be looking down a long, long lane, bordered on either side by enormous, century-old trees, and at the extreme end of the lane was a tiny light. It grew large and bright and resolved itself into the words which she had just seen him write, "Dr. von Dette and wife." It was almost a hallucination.

The next day, while he was purchasing cigarettes, she asked the clerk to let her see the register, pretending that she expected a friend to be there. She merely wished to gloat once more over the magic words.

She was still looking at his signature, when Ulrich came back.

"Are you expecting to see a friend, Alice?"

"No." The clerk looked up in surprise. To cover her confusion she said, "Yes, no. One always hopes to find a friend even if one does not expect anyone in particular."

Later in the day, as they came in from a stroll, a smartly gowned woman passed them in the hall on her way to one of the parlors. Alice started.

"Sally Hoskins," she ejaculated.

"Someone you know?" asked Ulrich.

"Yes, indeed, my oldest and dearest friend. Do you think she saw me, Ulrich?"

"I never noticed. Perhaps you had better not speak to her, dear."

"Nonsense, Sally wouldn't cut me. Wait for me, will you, Ulrich?"

"Very well," he said obediently.

She hurried after Sally, but as she approached her old school-mate, she became nervous. What if Sally did cut her after all?

"Alice Vaughn, I declare!"

Sally literally pounced on her. "You are certainly the last person I expected to see here. Why, dear girl, how well you look—and how happy."

An awkward pause fell. Alice said abruptly:

"Sally, you know about me, don't you?"

Sally nodded.

"I felt I ought to mention it to you. You might not care to——"

"Nonsense, dear, but I am glad Mother isn't here. Mother cried for two days and two nights, Alice, when we first heard of your affair."

"I am sorry. Your mother was very kind to me. How did you hear of it, Sally?"

"Through the papers. They treated you leniently, I

must say. They took the romantic view of your affair. Mother didn't."

Alice looked pained, while Sally scrutinized her closely. Presently she said:

"It is curious to girls brought up as you and I were brought up. That should be the unpardonable sin. And yet I am sure you are the same sweet, pure-minded girl you always were."

"I hope you hadn't expected to find me turned into a painted Jezebel. At any rate, I am glad you are not more scandalized, Sally."

"I think that, as we grow older, we modern women. we look at things from such a different view-point. It is not the offence against morality in the abstract that appals us. It is the concrete consequences for the person committing the breach that frighten us. And in your case it has turned out well."

"That is my good fortune, Sally. If Ulrich were different than he is, I might to-day be—well, you know what."

"If he were different than he is, you probably wouldn't have fallen in love with him."

Alice laughed.

"You seem fabulously happy," said her old chum.

"I am happy, so very happy!"

"And you have no regrets?"

"None whatever."

"That is more than most married women can say."

"Aren't you happy, Sally?"

"I'm divorced. Another woman, of course. It hurt horribly—I was so very much in love with him."

"I am so sorry, Sally."

They were both silent a moment—then presently Alice said:

"Will you allow me to introduce Ulrich to you? I should like you to see him. If you blame me a little, you will not blame me after you have seen him. You know I have never forgotten that you saved me from Ned."

Sally smiled.

"What a little Puritan you were in those days, Alice!"

"That is what Ulrich calls me now."

"Does he? That shows appreciation." Yes, I will let you introduce your Ulrich to me."

Alice rang for a page, and sent her lover a note, asking him to come to her, and the three sat and chatted for over an hour. Ulrich was charming and natural. At first he addressed Sally almost exclusively, and Alice purposely refrained from helping the conversation along. She wanted to see how they would get on together. But Ulrich forced her to talk. Once he got up and closed a window which caused a draught on Alice's back. Instead of reseating himself on the chair opposite to Sally, he sat down beside Alice on a divan, and began playing with her gloves. Suddenly he said:

"That reminds me, dear, you forgot to mend my glove for me."

"So I did. I will mend it before luncheon. You see, Sally, we are doing our own valeting and maiding."

A perplexed, puzzled look came into Sally's face. Ulrich excused himself soon after, and Alice said:

"Ulrich, dear, before you go, please leave me a little money. I want to get some souvenir cards, and I have no English money."

He handed her some gold, and asked her if it was enough.

When he was gone, Sally said enthusiastically:

"You are right, Alice. I do not blame you in the least now I have seen him. He is very charming. But, my,

dear, I have never seen a husband and wife who are as husbandly and wifely as you two."

"Ulrich says we are getting to be disgustingly *spießbürgerlich*. But, oh, Sally, it is so sweet to be vulgarly happy, and I love to think of his little comforts."

"Don't tell me you warm his slippers for him," cried Sally, horrified.

"I've done worse than that. I put his slippers on for him."

"Alice, how I envy you!"

"Don't, Sally, dear. You do not know what humiliation may yet be in store for me. But whatever happens, Sally, I would not barter this year of supreme happiness I have had with him for a cycle of dull content."

Before they parted, Alice asked her friend to visit her at Hohen. But Sally said that at present she would not come. Her own unhappiness still wore a raw edge; she could not bear to be in the presence of such radiant, overwhelming joy as informed her friend.

In the afternoon Ulrich and Alice went to Christy's, and Ulrich complimented her upon her knowledge of furniture and the judgment she showed in appraising its age and its value.

"Rank charlatanism, Ulrich. I guessed. I was so ashamed of my ignorance, I skimmed through a dozen books the last two weeks."

Ulrich was delighted.

"I hope you are going to ask me to buy you something," he said. "You have never yet asked me to buy something in particular."

"How can I? You anticipate my every wish."

They left Christy's early, and drove to Westminster Abbey. Shoulder to shoulder, they read off the names of the illustrious dead.

Alice had never been in London before, and she revelled in the literary atmosphere, the historic associations which abounded about her. In the glow of her enjoyment she forgot entirely that her lover's ancestors also had helped to make history, and that his race could claim kinship with half a dozen of England's sovereigns. He in no way interrupted her ecstasies. It amused him to see her so effervescent. Suddenly she recollected his identity.

"What a goose you must think me, Ulrich, to enthuse so about dead royalty!"

He laughed.

"You see," he said, "I myself lack the proper reverence for royalty. No one, I imagine, but a free-born American citizen, ever enjoys to the uttermost the savor and pomp of royal rank."

"Now you are laughing at me, Ulrich."

"No, dear. I am laughing at myself. What miserable puppets we are, we kings and princes! I feel this very keenly, and yet I lack the courage to divest myself of all the tinselled fripperies of rank. That's the saddest part of it, Alice. One's moral fibre becomes vitiated, emasculated. In the eyes of our subjects we are nothing but a breed of race-horses, whom they stable and feed and care for for their own especial delectation on gala-days, and in return for the stabling and the grooming and the feed, the race-horses must breed as the people desire—that is to say, only with our kind—lest a drop of newer, alien blood give too substantial a grain to our muscle, or corrugate our brain too thoroughly, or, in brief, lessen our toy and show qualities. And so from generation to generation we breed as our masters desire—in return for our stabling and our grooming and our feed."

"That's the first time, Ulrich, I have ever heard you say anything crude."

"If the truth offends you, I am sorry."

"It is not the truth I object to, but your manner of putting it."

Her lips curled disdainfully, the tilt of her nose was eloquent of disgust. He saw that she was really offended.

"I spoke to you, Alice, as to a brother scientist, in scientific jargon."

Her mouth relaxed, become less rigid.

"There is Egon," she said, and with joy inexpressible he realized that she was angry with him for disparaging himself. "You are not as selfish as you pretend to be."

He was silent for a minute, then he said:

"I am afraid I am a good deal more selfish than you think. I am afraid my love of my rank is stronger than my love of my profession and than my love of Egon."

"Stronger also," she said a little bitterly, "than your love of me?"

"No, that is not true, Alice. If I had to choose between you and my rank, you know very well that I would not relinquish you. But since you indulge me, allow me to keep my plaything, my title, my appanage, I would be foolish, would I not, to insist on giving them up? I hope you realize by this time, my dear girl, that the feeling over and above love which I feel for you is not contempt, as you imagined it would be, but a very profound gratitude."

She smiled up into his face.

A little later she said, "Isn't George Eliot buried here?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because——"

"I see. Ulrich, if they barred all the men against whose lives they could place a bar sinister, how many of the illustrious dead, do you think, would have to be ejected?"

He pretended to be shocked, but could not help laughing. Suddenly he asked:

"How far back can you trace your ancestry?"

"To the earliest times," she replied tartly. "We are all descended from Adam and Eve."

He did not smile, but said insistently:

"Answer me seriously, dear."

"Oh, I don't know. I never cared a fig for pedigrees and that sort of thing. I heard too much about it when I was a child, I think. My aunt was very democratic, and my father was the reverse. He used to talk family history, and that we were descended from Robert the Bruce, or Llewellyn, or somebody, and my aunt used to poke fun at him. So I learned to think there was nothing in what father used to say."

"But was there?"

"I do not know, Ulrich. There's an old, old oaken chest in the attic at home, in my home town I mean, in which there are a lot of old papers."

"Is the place closed?"

"No. It's rented. I lived on the rental, until you rescued me."

"Is the chest safe?"

"Perfectly."

"Some day we'll go over there, and go through those papers."

"What an odd notion of yours, Ulrich!"

"Oh, well——" he answered evasively.

The sale at Christy's was to start the next afternoon,

and they got there an hour before the sale started. Ulrich was intensely interested in a suit of old French armor—a jousting suit, with an enormous javelin, helmet, cabasset and gloves.

"I think I shall buy that for myself, Alice. I do wish there was something you fancied particularly."

Suddenly a great wave of tenderness for him swept over her. She was superlatively happy, and he had made her so. She desired to actively contribute to his happiness. It seemed to her that he was doing so much more for her than she could ever do for him. She remembered the wish he had expressed that she would ask him to buy her some particular *objet de vertu*. Hastily she glanced about to find something that she might request him to purchase, something that was not very expensive.

"Ulrich."

"Yes, dear?"

"I should like you to give me something, a vase for my boudoir."

His face lighted up with a flame-like radiance. She pretended not to notice how happy she had made him.

"Which vase, dear?"

"That one over there, the small greyish vase."

It was as she thought, a shabby-looking little thing, worth probably—since such bric-à-brac sold for enormous prices—about fifty or seventy pounds. She had, unfortunately, omitted the study of porcelains from her curriculum.

"Yes, dearest," he pressed her hand lightly.

They approached the case. She saw that he was looking at a different vase from the one she had in mind. The one he was looking at was very much prettier and richer looking. It was underglazed in pale blue, and the dragons and eagles which formed the design had eyes and

talons and beaks of inlaid jade. She was sure it was much more expensive than the insignificant little vase she had selected. And she did not wish him to spend a large sum for the gift. He could easily afford seventy pounds or so, and the pleasure in presenting it to her would be wholly sentimental, at any rate.

"I didn't mean the blue vase, Ulrich, but the little grey vase."

"Don't you think the blue as pretty?"

"I prefer the grey one," she said resolutely. "The blue one is not nearly as nice."

He looked dubious. She thought he disapproved of her taste.

"The grey one is charming," she said. It was just like him to want her to have the more expensive vase.

He consulted the catalog. His face became grave, pained even. She looked at him in surprise. Suddenly he looked up.

"I am so very sorry, dearest," he said in a crestfallen voice. "It is the first thing you have ever asked me to give you, and now I am forced to refuse it. The grey vase is eggshell porcelain. There are only two specimens like it in existence, and it is valued at about six thousand pounds sterling."

Dumfounded she stood and looked at him. He misunderstood her silence.

"If it is not sold to-day," he said, "I will see if I can get Seligmann to loan me the money on a note, and then, perhaps I can get it for you at any rate."

Alice was crushed by the catastrophe that had overtaken her crafty plan to make him happy.

"I had no idea it was so expensive," she said vaguely. He assured her he would try to get the money. She implored him not to run into debt, but to get the blue one

instead. He retorted it was not to be thought of, since she didn't fancy the blue one. And so on and on. The situation was ludicrous.

Finally she made him come and sit down beside her on a divan. She told him of the failure of her little plan to give him pleasure. At first he would not believe her, but when he was convinced, he threw back his head and laughed. When he looked at her again, the love-light was in his eyes.

"I wish I were as rich as J. P. Morgan, or John D.—so I could buy you everything you cared for, pictures, vases, jewelry, gowns, gems."

While he spoke the love-light flickered and flamed, and made of his fine dark eyes a pair of matchless gems. She wanted to tell him that so long as she had the power to transform his eyes into such wells of light, she did not value any gem on earth. But she said nothing. She feared he might forget himself and kiss her then and there.

That evening, as they sat in the sitting-room, Alice was humming a song. Sally had once remarked that she had no ear and less voice. Which was true. Ulrich endured the discord for a few minutes. Then, with aggravating affability, he said:

"Alice, dear, would it inconvenience you greatly to stop those attempts at warbling? Your voice, you know, is amorphous."

"Just what does 'amorphous' mean?" she asked sweetly.

To tantalize her, he retorted:

"Well, your voice is amorphous—that should explain the word."

He did not remove his eyes from the magazine he was reading, and when she looked at him, she saw that he was

smiling, and from the quality of that smile she knew that he expected her to kiss him.

But she did not kiss him. She stopped humming, and went on with her embroidery. She was not in the least offended by his frankness. She remembered how bitterly she had resented a similar remark made by him a few months before. How the bond between them was tightening, how firm and indissoluble it was becoming! Even a few months ago she had understood him very inadequately.

His previous criticism of her singing voice had made her utterly miserable. She believed that since he found any action of hers unendurable, he could not possibly love her, and she had ended that evening in complete dejection. Finally she had overcome the mood by reminding herself of his delicacy and kindness on a hundred and one occasions.

She recalled an episode that had occurred at the very outset of their *liaison*, soon after she had come to Hohen. He was forced to attend a physicians' convention in Paris, and as she was still clinging to her reputation at that time, it was impossible for her to accompany him. She had not believed that he was going to attend a convention. She thought it was the call of Paris, and she remembered that some French writer had spoken of "*nostalgie de la boue*" and she thought it was this that was taking him from her side. She suffered miserably after he had gone, and even his daily letter failed to reassure her. The letters seemed perfunctory, they were very different from himself. Later on she learned his abhorrence of letter-writing, and that it had been the first time in years that he had sent anyone a letter written by himself. But at the time she fretted and worried, and finally her fretting and worrying brought on a bad head-

ache. That was the fourth day after he had left. By noon she was blind with pain, and decided to go to bed. Then he had called her on the long distance telephone. He spoke in English, so that no one would overhear. He told her he would be with her that evening at ten o'clock, and would go back to Paris with the one o'clock train. He concluded, "I have been in torment, dearest, for the last twenty-four hours. You will not mind, I hope? I would be worth nothing for the rest of my stay. Is it all right?"

She had answered that it would be all right, but after she had disconnected, she had questioned her right to withhold from him the fact of her headache. But she was confident that she would be able to get rid of the pain before he arrived, now her maddening fear was obviated. She took a powder, and went to bed. But she could not get to sleep because now she worried that she might still be ill when he arrived. She took another powder. It had no effect. At five she sent for a physician, and asked for a hypodermic. He refused to give it, saying she would be all right by morning. She sent for another physician, with the same result. It was nine o'clock by that time, and the throbbing in her head was excruciating. Would he be very angry? She felt he had a right to be angry. She had no right to allow him to make the long and tedious trip when she did not know whether she would be feeling well. She should have told him over the telephone, and allowed him to decide what he would do.

At last he came. When he heard she was ill, he immediately metamorphosed himself from the lover into the physician. He was solicitude itself. He reproached her in no way. Tired as he was from his trip, he insisted on

massaging her neck and shoulders, which, he said, would relieve the nerves of the head. Within fifteen minutes she felt so decided an improvement that she was able to talk to him. But when he asked her what had brought on such a headache, she lacked the courage to tell him that she had been afraid of him. Then she began saying how sorry she was to disappoint him after his long trip, but he laughed at her, and called her his silly little sweetheart. Then he left her, bidding her go to sleep at once, before the effects of the massage could wear off.

How vividly she recalled everything! At one time she had tormented herself with the thought that he loved her for her beauty only. There was a legend of old Mexico City, told by Janvier, which relates how a beautiful girl, to test the love of her betrothed husband, destroyed her beauty by holding her face over a brazier filled with burning coal. She had frequently meant to ask Ulrich what he thought of the story. She knew him so well that she thought she knew what he would answer. He would say that as the girl had been beautiful when she accepted the man, and that as marriage was a contract and woman's beauty an asset, she was not living up to the terms of the contract and was virtually cheating the man when she defaced herself.

Alice was seized with a desire to see how closely his words would correspond with her notion of his views.

For a moment she sat watching him. The smile with which he had anticipated the kiss which she had withheld was gone. He had forgotten all about that episode, about her. He was immersed in the medical treatise he was reading.

She felt no jealousy of his interest in his work. Capable as she was of the intense jealousy of other women,

the petty, narrow egotism which makes the shallow woman jealous of her husband's brain-work was entirely foreign to her.

She sat down on the arm of the heavily upholstered chair, and put her arms about his shoulder. He continued reading, but the smile came back to his face, and he reached for the hand that lay upon his shoulder and laid it against his cheek. Suddenly he kissed her inner arm, and, without having said a word, continued his reading.

Heavens, how she loved him! How sweet it was to be near him day and night as she had been for the past forty-eight hours. Not since their honeymoon had they been so uninterruptedly together, and then they had each had a suite of rooms, and here they shared the same room both at night and in the day. She wondered whether he was enjoying this mutual life as she. Probably not. Probably he had not thought about it.

Finally he put away the magazine, and opened his arms. She did not creep into them, as he had expected, but said:

"I want you to listen to a short story I am going to tell you. I want your opinion of the heroine." And she related the story of the girl and the brazier. When she had finished, he said:

"I think the girl was very foolish to destroy her beauty. She must have been very young and blinded by religious mania, or she would have realized that she had aroused in her future husband along with his love the rarest and most precious of all sentiments—admiration. It is very rarely that a lover can whole-heartedly admire a woman, since the critical attitude is by no means incompatible with love. The brazier girl, in deliberately substituting compassion for admiration, showed herself lamentably ignorant of the subtle refinements of which the human soul

is capable. Compassion is such a vulgar sentiment. Every decent-minded man and woman experiences it half a dozen times a day for the blind, the poor, the halt. The deluded girl chose to throw away a divine spark for a bit of tawdry tinsel."

Alice was delighted with her lover's answer, which showed greater fineness and a more superb nobility than she had attributed to him.

"I hope you do not contemplate buying a brazier," he said.

"I am not neurotic, thank heaven," she retorted.

She went to the piano and opened it. It was a good instrument, and she played the scales rapidly and fluently to test its pitch and quality. It satisfied her. Ulrich, on that far-away occasion when he had criticised her singing, had also commented on the manner of her playing. He said she played after the abominable American fashion, which consisted of spanking and maltreating the keys instead of manipulating them.

She knew he was right and that her touch was atrocious, so she had procured the best teacher in Hohen and had worked "like a galley-slave," as she expressed it over her touch. But this she had not told him.

As she seated herself at the piano a look of comical dismay came into Ulrich's face. Doubtless she intended hammering off some selection from comic opera, a form of entertainment particularly displeasing to him. But he said nothing. She had allowed him to read his magazine article in peace, without humming in his ears. It would really be a shame to deprive her of this other outlet for her feelings.

She played "Asa's Death" from the Peer Gynt Suite by Grieg, played it solemnly, mystically, witchingly, with all the lurid pathos, the hidden pain which the magical

composition is capable of yielding. She played with an authoritative touch that amazed him. He spoke to her, asked her who had taught her, begged her to reply, but she ignored his volley of questions, and having finished "Asa's Death" she improvised a few bars in order to make a graceful transition from the grave Norseman to the joyous simplicity of Mendelssohn. As she broke into the "Spring Song," and trill after trill tripped forth from under her fingers, and bubbled out its melodious flood-tide of youth and joy and happiness, he stood near her with the face of a man who sees a vision.

"Alice, it is wonderful—and in such a short time—you must have worked very hard—you did this to please me?"

She did not reply, but played on and on. She caught the look of entreaty in his eyes. Smiling, still playing, she threw back her head and offered him her lips.

"Darling," he murmured, "how happy we are!"

CHAPTER XXV

Ulrich had telephoned that he would be late, asking her to wait up for him if not too tired. So she sat, in *negligée*, in her pretty rose and lilac garnished boudoir, reading and waiting.

It was one o'clock when he finally came.

"I thought I would never get rid of the whole gang," he said. The "gang" were the ministers of state. He kissed her absentmindedly.

"You are very tired, Ulrich." As he did not reply, she asked:

"Will you have something to eat? I have some sandwiches for you and some nice cold *Pilsener*. Also *Laubenheimer*. Both cold. Are you hungry?"

"I could eat iron bars and wooden tables."

She produced the sandwiches, and he looked them over critically.

"I don't like roast beef sandwiches," he said.

"Of all unbelievable ingratitude," said Alice laughing. "They are not roast beef. Tongue and chicken."

He helped himself to a chicken sandwich.

"How is Egon?"

"Better. He will be all right to-morrow. I was afraid this morning that it might be something serious."

She peeled an apple for him, and then came and sat on his lap, and fed it to him in slices, and between each mouthful she wiped his mouth with a filmy lace kerchief and kissed him.

This mode of eating was not expeditious, and fully half

an hour elapsed before he had finished the apple. Then the telephone rang, and Alice, who was already undressing, ran to answer the call.

"Yes, Frau von Schwellenberg, the Prince Regent is here. No, he is not in bed. What is the matter? What? The King is worse? Here, Ulrich!"

Ulrich said very little but listened attentively to what the *Freiherrin* was saying.

"I had better go right home," he said, as he hung up the receiver. "I do not think Egon is as ill as she seems to think, still I had better go."

In spite of his indifferent manner, Alice saw that he was greatly troubled.

"Let me come, too, Ulrich," she begged. "I may be able to help you."

"Not to-night," he said firmly. "I will telephone you the first thing in the morning."

After he had gone, she began rummaging around to find a plain white shirtwaist and skirt to wear in case Egon required nursing. She found her old nurse's uniform, and measured the waistband and bust. She found that she would not be able to wear it. It was amazing how much stouter she had become in the last year.

After finding what she needed, she went to bed. She was awake before six, and ringing for her maid, she took a cold bath and a cup of chocolate; then motored to the *Neues Palais*.

There was no need to ask Ulrich whether Egon was dangerously ill. His face was sufficient index of the fact. He was very pale, almost ashen, his eyes showed deep circles, and were rimmed with red. He had telegraphed to Paris and Berlin for a number of specialists for children's diseases. He feared that spinal meningitis was developing, but would not trust his own judgment.

What puzzled him was that Egon was lucid and conscious.

The specialists were due by noon, and Ulrich snatched three hours of sleep before they came. They had a long consultation, and finally concluded that Egon had meningitis complicated with intestinal catarrh.

For two days and two nights, alternately and together, Ulrich and Alice, side by side, fought a losing battle with death. They knew it was a losing battle, but they fought on valiantly, blindly, never relaxing their vigilance, hoping against hope that Egon would live.

On the third morning, Egon said:

"Dear, dear Schatzie, I believe there is one thing that could make me well. Would Cousin Ulrich permit them to call me King just once?"

She went to Ulrich, and told him what the child had said.

"Very well," he said. "He shall have his wish fulfilled."

A half-hour later the Aides, the Royal Guard, all in full dress uniform, entered the room where the little King lay dying. They arranged themselves about the room, and stood at attention. There followed the Ministers, the Royal Chaplain, the Master of Ceremonies, the Master of the Royal Horse, the Chamberlain, the ladies-in-waiting, the gentlemen of Ulrich's suite. The room was crowded with men in gay uniforms, with smartly gowned women.

Egon lay back among his pillows, his fever-glazed eyes rapturously devouring every detail of the pageant.

"Dear Countess Gortza," he murmured, "how happy I am!"

One by one they came forward, bent over the child's emaciated little hand, and kissed it. One by one they

passed from the room slowly. Some of the women sobbed. Not an eye in the room was dry.

Alice stood at the head of the bed, beside Egon, and watched the solemn procession sweep by. What a mockery! What a sham! The incident was without precedent, but genuine compassion was depicted on every face, genuine desire to please a dying child moved every heart, as men and women alike paid homage to the child sovereign who had not another day to live.

Egon sank rapidly after that. He lapsed into unconsciousness. At midnight, he regained consciousness for the last time. He asked Ulrich to leave him alone a few minutes with "his dear Countess."

"Schatzie," he said, in his sweet, coaxing way, "I want to ask this of you. Cousin Ulrich would have laughed at me. After I am dead, and when they place me in that big, cold mausoleum, I want you to please have Fido put in the coffin with me, at my feet. He always slept at my feet, and when he died last summer, Cousin Ulrich had him mounted for me, and I kept him in my room. I was afraid he would be lonely. And when I am dead, I want Fido with me! The mausoleum is so cold and big!"

He died at two in the morning. Alice and Ulrich were alone with him. Gunther was waiting in the room beyond, with a score of officers, aides and ministers, for it is usage at Court to salute the new sovereign the moment the old is dead.

The King is dead! Long live the King!

For the second time in a year the kingdom of Hohenhof-Hohe changed sovereigns.

But Alice did not think of this, as she knelt at the dead child's bedside, and prayed. Ulrich, seeing her on her knees at prayer, left the room quietly, believing that she

desired to be alone with the body of the child she had loved so well.

As she rose from her knees, she saw that Ulrich was gone. She kissed Egon upon the brow, and passed into the ante-chamber.

The minister of state, Bartow-Freylingen, was making a speech. The others, five deep, were standing about Ulrich in a semicircle, heads bowed and bared. Bartow-Freylingen was saying that shocking though it was to lose so promising a child as the young King had been, it was only fair for patriots to remind themselves that the calamity, as far as their country was concerned, would have been infinitely greater if they had lost the Prince Regent, and he believed he was only voicing the earnest hope of his countrymen in saying that he hoped, out of fairness to his country, that the consciousness of his own inestimable value to the State would help mitigate the personal grief for the deceased which they all appreciated was harassing the Prince Regent, now their King!

Their King! Ulrich was King!

The realization of that struck and gashed through Alice's heart like a knife. By one of the strange fatuities of fate, which sometimes afflict and blind us when our own interests are most at stake, the political effect of Egon's death had never occurred to the girl. She had seen in Egon primarily the little fatherless and motherless lad whom Ulrich loved so deeply, and whom, for Ulrich's sake, even more than for his own, she also loved. Now, quite suddenly, the political importance of this small child's life, and the importance to herself as well, flashed upon her.

Ulrich was King! He had loved his rank before, how much more would he prize and value his kingship? Could she hope now to ever be his wife?

The room swam before her eyes. She became dizzy and faint. Her knees began to shake. She heard no more of Bartow-Freylingen's impromptu speech. Sick, giddy, nauseated, unperceived by Ulrich, whose back was turned to her, she threw herself into a large arm-chair, and, unable to restrain herself, burst into a passionate torrent of tears.

Dead silence fell upon the room. Bartow-Freylingen's voice ceased. Only the sobbing of the agonized girl continued to be heard. Suddenly Alice felt an arm placed about her waist, felt her head lifted from the hard wooden back of the chair, felt her brow rebound upon an arm. And now she heard Ulrich speaking:

"Count von Bartow-Freylingen, you will forgive me if I ask you to discontinue your very kind words for the present. Here is someone who needs me."

He lifted her out of the chair, and took her into his arms, and held her closely to his heart, as closely as he could, with the gesture of protection that he had employed once before.

Slowly the assembled Court filed from the room. They had the decency, men and women both, to avert their eyes, to not more than glance at the fair, slim girl who was crying so bitterly in the arms of their sovereign.

When they were alone, he led her to a divan. He took her on his knee; he soothed her with tender and reverent kisses. But she cried on and on. And the real sting, the supreme bitterness of it all was that she could not tell him *why* she was crying so inconsolably.

As her tempest of tears spent itself, hope, which she thought dead together with the child that lay in the adjoining room, came back. Hope would not die. Some day, *perhaps* some day, after all, he would ask her to be his *wife*.

CHAPTER XXVI

They had named the beautiful mansion which Alice now occupied "*Seelenruh*"—Peace of Soul—and she had furnished one of the brightest and most cheerful rooms in the house for Egon. She had not mentioned this to Ulrich, meaning to surprise him as well as the child.

After Egon's death, she had the room closed, and left just as it was. She could not bear the thought of entering it alone, nor could she bear to inflict further pain upon Ulrich by asking him to come into this room with her. She put off disposing of the toys, the bed, the little dressing-gown, and night-dress and slippers from week to week; and the weeks trailed into months and the months into years.

One day, some five years after Egon's death, she summoned courage and entered the room. She wanted to send the toys to the hospital. But on entering the room a sense of desolation swept over her. She found an old, battered Teddy bear of which, big boy though he was when he died, Egon had been very fond. A hundred empty little sayings of the dead boy, his sweet, winning ways, his bewitching smile, came back to her vividly. How Ulrich had loved Egon, to be sure!

The maid came panting up the stairs to announce that his Majesty was below. Alice went down immediately.

"You have been crying," he said.

She told him where she had been, and he insisted on coming up to the room with her. Together they sorted the toys, putting aside the old ones, with which Egon had

played. They could not bear to think of these toys being thrown about, carelessly handled and cast aside by any other child.

But as they sat there together, immersed in these tender and melancholy reflections, they were both perfectly aware that it was not Egon primarily of whom they were thinking.

The march of time is inexorable, and these two, from being the most passionate lovers, had become the most devoted and loyal mates. They no longer knew the meaning of jealousy. He was convinced that no other man could ever win from her the lightest, fleeting thought; she realized that no other woman could ever usurp her place.

And yet they were not happy. They were mates, companions, friends, but every year made them both feel the absence of a child, or children, more and more keenly. She, with her strong, healthy, sane instincts, was destined by nature to bear child after child without impairing her vitality; he, with his quick, swift, passionate brain, was intended to be not merely a leader among men, but more particularly a leader and teacher of his own offspring. Each knew what the other felt, and yet both remained silent; but both had thought and thought about the matter and sought blindly to find some solution of the problem.

"Alice," said Ulrich abruptly, "I have something to tell you. You remember the chest containing old family documents which I asked you to place at my disposal?" She nodded, and he continued. "I had all these papers sent to the Herald's College, London, in the hopes of establishing a pedigree for you that would lead back to Robert the Bruce without a break."

"And did they succeed?"

"No," he said gloomily.

The girl laughed.

"Even if they had succeeded, Ulrich dear," she said coaxingly, "that one drop of blue blood would have been so diluted by the time it reached my veins that it wouldn't have constituted me a fit spouse for one of the kings of the earth at any rate. Wouldn't it?"

Her irony jarred him.

"You have no idea, Alice," he said bitterly, "what a disappointment this has been to me. I had hatched a plan, a diabolical plan, a mischievous plan, a pernicious plan, for enabling us to marry."

And speaking quickly, without elaboration, he told her how he had intended having the rumor spread that she was the illegitimate offspring of one of the royal Hapsburgs, and he had hoped, her descent from the Bruce being established, to be able to railroad an act through the Chamber allowing him to marry her, and to recognize her as his queen. But the Ministers, it seemed, would not permit the deception, and without their support Ulrich was powerless to carry out his scheme.

Alice looked at him in disapproving silence.

"Ulrich," she said, "why won't you marry me *morganatically*?"

He shook his head.

"Shall I tell you why, Ulrich?" she said. "Because you desire children, and you cannot bear the thought that your legitimate offspring should not be able to inherit the crown."

Again he shook his head vigorously, but he could not look her in the eye.

"Ulrich," she said in a soft, subdued voice, "we have both avoided this topic. Why not have it out?"

She was kneeling on the floor, among the old toys,

and taking up a broken, shabby little wooden horse, she continued playing with it, her arm resting on his knee.

He took her by the shoulders and turned her body about so she faced him.

"Look at me," he commanded sternly.

She lifted her eyes and fearlessly met his.

"Alice," he said, "we two, you and I, have made a pretty bad mess of our lives. I'm not blaming you. It's my fault, as I'm well aware of, and we've managed to knock a good deal of oblique happiness out of things as they are. But as a whole, our life is a mess. And we are jointly responsible."

"I didn't know you felt that way about it," she stammered.

"Well, I do. As one grows older, one misses certain things—certain privileges—parenthood."

She sat back among the toys, and absent-mindedly began playing with some tin soldiers.

"Do you know what is going to happen in time, Ulrich?" she said. "We are going to separate."

"Nonsense!" he replied viciously. "I'll never consent to a separation. Neither would you. We belong to each other."

He got up and walked to the window, and stood staring out upon the river. She, sitting on the floor, watched each graceful movement of the tall, loosely hung, aristocratic figure.

She had some conception of what was passing in his mind. Alice was by no means dull, and the signs of the times all pointed in one direction. Sylvia, who had come into the Grandduchy at last, was quite frank about her desire to bring about an alliance between Ulrich and herself. Gunther knew it, Alice knew it, the world knew it, and although Gunther and Alice disapproved, the world

approved and desired the alliance and brought pressure to bear upon Ulrich in a thousand and one ways. Patriotism flared high; the possibility of the union was a matter of daily discussion in the papers; the ministry upheld and abetted the press. Everybody longed to see the royal match consummated. Everybody excepting Gunther, Alice and Ulrich.

Was he really opposed to the union? Alice had asked herself the question more than once, and now, as she sat there, still on the floor, watching the tall, athletic figure of her lover, she could control herself no longer.

"Ulrich," she said, "do you wish to marry Sylvia."

"What a fool question!" he said angrily. "Certainly not."

"Then why this vehemence? Usually you content yourself with laughing when I suggest something you have no notion for."

"I don't wish it," he iterated doggedly.

"Ulrich, one of the papers the other day suggested that the 'royal alliance may nevertheless take place, if the Countess can be brought to lend her lover for a little while.' Did you see the article I refer to?"

"Yes." He began stamping about the room. "Bartow-Freylingen had the impudence to approach me on the subject. I very nearly disgraced myself by throwing him out of the room."

"What was the suggestion?"

"I will tell you. Before I tell, however, I wish you to understand that not for one moment did I consent to consider so infamous a suggestion."

"I understand that, Ulrich, dear."

"Bartow-Freylingen came to me and brought up the question of the marriage once more. He suggested that the Grand-duchess would have no objection whatever to

you and myself continuing on the present footing. He was even authorized to say, he gave me to understand, that the Grandduchess would leave me *entirely free*, the only proviso being, of course, that we would have to secure the succession. That end being attained, she would not expect to see me at Hohenlof-Lohe, at all—unless I chose. He suggested that I approach you on the subject. I declined, of course. He begged me to consider the good of the country—the kingdom and the duchy united once more, and all the rest of that twaddle. I lost my temper, and pretty nearly kicked him out.”

“Ulrich, I want you to promise me one thing. The time may come when you desire to marry Sylvia; if so, I want you to do me the justice of telling me so.”

“I shall never wish to marry her,” he said once more.

Alice did not believe him. She knew she had his love, she knew that no other woman would ever be able to take her place in Ulrich’s heart, but she knew that pitted against his love for her on the one side were his desire for fatherhood and his ambition on the other.

Poor love! Could love hold her own against her two rivals? Day after day the pressure upon Ulrich was continued. The entire country seemed to be in an uproar. King Ulrich was their idol. He had brought them prosperity; agriculture and industry and commerce had attained an undreamed-of height under his reign; it was the boast of Hohenhof-Hohe that no man went to bed supperless and that no child went unschooled. Why then, should he, who had done so much to secure his subjects’ happiness, refuse to consummate this alliance which would unite the two states into one and secure the succession?

Ulrich was visibly harassed. He rarely mentioned the subject to Alice, but one day, when he came in for sup-

per, he seemed entirely unstrung. She could not get him to talk at first, but suddenly he said:

"Alice, why didn't you have the courage to make me marry you five years ago?"

She replied truthfully:

"Because I feared that you would reproach me for it one day; and now you are reproaching me for not doing it."

"Forgive me, dear. I am a brute." He kissed her hands passionately, but she knew that the crisis was drawing nearer, and must ultimately be faced and dealt with.

Gunther called on her a few days after this. She had not seen him for a month.

"I have neglected you shamefully," he said apologetically. "What selfish creatures we men are! I haven't been near you for a month, and now I come to worry you with my troubles."

"What's wrong, Gunther?"

"Sylvia."

Alice's heart began to beat more rapidly. Fear pulled at her heart-strings.

"Is she—are they——" she asked limply.

"Not yet. But it's coming, Alice, it's sure as death. And to think I have loved that woman all these years! Ulrich and she—they are a team. She's treated me just as badly as he has treated you."

"I do not consider that Ulrich has treated me at all badly," the girl interposed.

"Oh, of course, it's just like a woman to take the part of the man who has behaved toward her like a brute. Why doesn't he marry you? You're the best and the sweetest and the truest of women, and what has he made of you? Oh, it makes me sick, it makes me sick!" cried

poor Gunther. Then he added hastily, "It's not on account of my wanting the crown. I hope you know that. I wanted the crown only because I knew it would bring me Sylvia, and now that I don't want her any longer, the devil take the crown and the kingdom, too, for all I care."

Alice, sorry though she felt for Gunther, could barely suppress a smile.

"Gunther, dear," she said, patting the young fellow's cheek, as she would have patted the cheek of a child, "tell me, if you can manage to be coherent, just what has happened."

It seemed that at Gunther's request Sylvia had invited Princess Mary to Hohenhof-Lohe to spend a month with her. Gunther had intended bringing Mary to Hohen to meet Alice, but when he suggested doing so, Mary had refused to come.

"Do you know, Alice, Sylvia had poisoned her mind against you. I tell you I'm sick of our entire family—we're a rotten lot, we von Dettas."

"Sylvia had told her the truth, I suppose," she suggested.

"What business had she to tell tales? Everybody who knows you loves and respects you," cried Gunther, "but oh, I cannot tell you how it made me feel, for you. And after all Sylvia's professions of friendship and loyalty!"

"Gunther, dear," said Alice, "it is very sweet of you to feel all this so keenly for me. But surely something else happened. You are not so bitter only on my account."

"Meaning that I am selfish, which I suppose is quite true."

Alice noticed that he felt some reluctance in being frank with her. It was from disjointed remarks and one or two little episodes which he related that the girl gathered the course events had taken. Sylvia, it seemed, had

been very kind and gracious to her little English cousin the first week, but when Gunther arrived on the scene, she had expected to monopolize his attentions as usual. The young aide thought it only fair that he should try to make Mary's stay as happy as possible, so he golfed and rowed and played tennis with her, to "amuse the little thing." Sylvia detested physical exertion of any kind. Friction of some sort was unavoidable, there were unpleasant words—stinging remarks made to Mary by Sylvia, tears on Mary's part. "All in all," Gunther concluded dryly, "Mary had an uncommonly pleasant visit." He paused a moment, then went on. "What I would like to know, Alice, is why won't Sylvia marry me? If she loves me, why should ambition for a second crown deter her from marrying me? Great Scott! I've been tied to her apron-strings long enough. I'm tired of it."

Her chin resting on her hand, Alice gravely regarded the young man. Presently he resumed his lamentations.

"Sylvia is going to succeed in getting Ulrich to marry her."

"Yes, I think she is," she said calmly.

"What are you going to do about it?" he cried. "Heavens and earth, you're not going to release him, are you? By George, it would be the meanest, scurviest trick I ever heard of if Ulrich were to leave you after all these years."

"If you please, Gunther, I prefer not to discuss Ulrich, even with you."

"Oh, very well."

He was not offended; he stood looking down at Alice curiously. Suddenly he blurted out, in the boyish way he had:

"Ulrich's a fool as well as a scamp if he gives you up to marry Sylvia. I've been in love with Sylvia for ten

years, but I wouldn't marry her now that I realize what a calculating, selfish, heartless little beast she is for all the kingdoms of the world."

Alice laughed as she said:

"Gunther, if Sylvia were to write you this one little line, 'I will consent to be your wife,' you'd hitch your three racing motors to the fastest express train in the hopes of making better time in getting to her."

"Perhaps I would," he admitted. "Good-bye, Alice. I'll drop in to-morrow, if I may." He kissed her hand, made her one of his magnificent bows, and was gone.

That afternoon she had another visitor. Bartow-Freylingen called, and she and he were closeted for over half an hour. She had expected this visit for days; she knew it was inevitable, and she knew furthermore that when he called it would be to sound the death-knell of her love.

Ulrich came an hour after Bartow-Freylingen had left.

She could not guess from his face whether he knew that his Minister of State had called or not. There was much about statecraft that eluded Alice, and the diplomacy of Bartow-Freylingen was much too fine to be easily comprehended. She had been unable to gather any precise impression from her interview with the great diplomat as to Ulrich's real attitude in the matter. The Minister had made his appeal to her on the ground of politics only, urging her to offer to release Ulrich, as the well-known chivalry of the King forbade his making the suggestion. In some subtle way he had contrived to give her the impression that the King, although no one enjoyed his confidence in the matter, would heartily welcome such a request for a release on personal grounds as well as for state reasons.

"Ulrich," she said, as soon as he was seated, "I want to have a long talk with you, dear."

"About what?"

"About ourselves, Ulrich. It must have occurred to you that we cannot go on indefinitely on our present footing. I want to offer to release you, Ulrich."

"What makes you think that I desire to be released, Alice?"

"Many things. For myself also, I think, a separation would be better. Perhaps, instead of offering to release you, I should have asked you to release me."

"I confess, this strikes me as being rather sudden."

"No, Ulrich, it is not sudden at all. We have both realized for over a year, although we have never spoken of it, that a separation would ultimately be inevitable."

"Why should it be?"

"Ulrich," she said, and a tremor vibrated in her voice, "neither of us is satisfied with the present state of affairs. We became lovers because, in the first place, we were ideally suited to each other, and in the second place we met at the psychological moment. If I had been a little older, you would not have dazzled me to the extent of paralyzing my sense of right and wrong, as you did, nor would I have inspired you with that desire to mould me and re-shape me and make me, body and soul, into precisely that which you wanted me to be. Love was the one significant, potent fact in life. Everything else dwindled away before the majesty of love. But we passed the spring-time of youth. We love each other more deeply than we did then, but those moments of ecstasy can never return. There are persons of both sexes who, when the spring-time of love recedes, seek to revive that spring-time with another partner. Both you and I are too sane to attempt anything of that sort. We

realize the seriousness of life, and that love is but the beginning, and can never be the end. We have lost the spring-time of love, but we have the gold and purple of summer before us. After the blossom the fruit. We cannot enjoy our summer—you and I—because for us there can be no fruition. We are compelled, because of our peculiar situation, to thwart Nature, to destroy, instead of creating.

"That is why we are not happy. It is not because we do not love each other, but because loving each other as tenderly as we do, we both feel the immorality and futility of our love."

"I have not dared to face the situation as clearly as you are doing," he said.

"Oh, Ulrich," she continued, speaking more rapidly and more passionately than before, "can you imagine, I wonder, just how I have longed for a child, *your* child? And desiring maternity so passionately, have you any notion how barbarously, fiendishly cruel it was to be forced to avoid motherhood, to be compelled to employ incessant vigilance in the thwarting of Nature's sanest and truest instinct?"

She had not meant to plead for herself, but the pain she had endured almost in silence for years had overflowed. She had merely wished to make him believe that she was perfectly willing to agree to a separation, but she had gone too far. She had aroused in him a suspicion that she desired a separation on her own account.

He became very pale. He sat looking at her without speaking. She was in her prime. The pale, virginal girl had matured into a woman of radiant beauty and womanliness. Her manner had lost none of its sincerity and sparkle, which it had pleased him to think were American traits, and she had acquired the dignified ele-

gance which marks the woman of the world. She had a charm all her own, and although she had never told him, he knew that more than one man of wealth and position had offered her marriage.

With this in mind, he said finally:

"Alice, do I understand that you wish to be released so you can marry, or that you wish to release me so that I may marry?"

"I desire a separation on your account principally," she replied, "but I desire it on my account also."

"You are evading my question. You have never told me, but I am sure that Grand-duke Boris wants you to be his wife. Am I right?"

"Three times Boris has asked me to marry him, Ulrich. He told me frankly the first time he proposed that he came to Hohen with the intention of 'stealing me away' from you. He wanted me to live with him. He ended by asking me to marry him."

She did not tell her lover all she knew in connection with the Boris affair. The Grandduke had told her that Sylvia had sent him Alice's picture, and had invited him to Hohen for the purpose of bringing about an estrangement between Ulrich and herself. He had thought it good sport, and had taken Sylvia's "dare." But on meeting Alice, he had abandoned the "sport," and had asked her to be his wife. This was only one of Sylvia's desperate moves to capture Hohenhof-Hohe.

Ulrich looked at her fixedly. Slowly he asked:

"Do you wish to marry Boris?"

"I have never thought about it seriously. If it makes this step easier for you, dear, I will promise you not to marry Boris or any other man."

He took her hand in his.

"Alice," he said tenderly, "I quite deserve your looking

upon me as a monument of selfishness. I would certainly not exact such a promise. On the contrary, it would make a separation very much easier for me, if I thought that you were looking forward to a future similar to mine."

She said nothing. All the blood in her body seemed to be rushing to her heart. She could see from Ulrich's manner that he welcomed the idea of a separation, and he was asking her quite calmly to marry another man. Great God! Had Ulrich any notion of just *how* she loved him?

She controlled herself with difficulty. She wanted to give him pleasure, and if it made it easier for him to think she desired marriage with another man, she would pretend to be at least not averse to such a plan.

"Alice," he said gently, "answer me."

"I cannot promise you that I will marry Boris."

He urged insistently.

She walked across the room, and, to steady her nerves, placed her burning hands on the cold alabaster of the mantel-piece. She felt her self-possession going, and she had a horror of fainting or of beginning to cry. When she turned to answer Ulrich a moment later, her voice was tranquil.

"If we decide upon a separation, Alice, will you allow me to pension you?"

"It will not be necessary. I have put aside a sum of money every year, which the banker, Seligmann, invested for me in state bonds—and the income of these bonds I devoted to charitable purposes, heretofore. The income amounts to about three thousand dollars annually. That will amply suffice for my needs, and I love you far too deeply, Ulrich, to feel that I am placing myself under an improper obligation to you in retaining that money."

"Thank you, Alice," he said simply.

She had no intention of using any portion of that money for herself. She would give it away to charities, as she had done before, but she knew that he would never consent to a separation unless he believed her comfortable.

"Ulrich," she said suddenly, after a long pause, "if you decide upon a separation, I wish you would make no further effort to see me. Let this be the last time we meet. It will make things easier for both of us."

"Very well."

His face was ghastly. She wondered vaguely if she was as pale as he. She knew, as she looked upon the tortured expression of his face, that his decision had been reached even then.

"Alice, before I go, may I kiss you?"

"I would rather you didn't, Ulrich."

"Very well."

At the door he turned and looked at her.

"Good-bye, Alice," he said in a choking voice.

"Good-bye, Ulrich."

She dared not look at him, for her eyes were blinded with tears. She checked them, and forced back the sobs that were shaking her, until she knew he was well out of the house. Then she collapsed upon the floor, and buried her face upon the divan where he had been but a minute before, and cried as if her heart were breaking.

And it was.

CHAPTER XXVII

The excitement which the news of the engagement of the King and the Grandduchess occasioned was indescribable. The streets were gay with bunting, students and children and even staid old citizens trailed through the streets laughing and joking and singing. The entire country seemed to have gone mad with joy.

Alice shut herself up in her house, but although the grounds were so large that the tumult of the celebrations and festivities could not reach her, she could not escape from the scenes of hilarity upon the river. The town was taking a holiday, and as the weather was perfect, crowds of small river craft sailed and rowed and steamed up and down-stream, past "*Seelenruh*," filled with gaily attired and happy merry-makers.

"*Seelenruh!*" What irony! Alice expected to feel some regret at leaving the beautiful mansion over which she had ruled as mistress for five years; she found that she was beginning to hate and loathe it. She refused to see all who called, even Gunther, but he sent Estelle to tell her mistress that he would not leave Hohen without bidding her adieu. So Alice consented to see him.

She had expected to hear the young man break into a wild tirade against Sylvia, but for once she was so filled with her own misery, that she had no sympathy left for anyone. Her powers of endurance were almost broken. To her surprise, she found Gunther composed and quiet. He did not kiss her hand as usual, but with

a brotherly gesture of affection, stooped over her and kissed her cheek.

"Poor little girl," he said, "poor little girl!"

"For Heaven's sake, don't pity me, Gunther," she said curtly.

He sat down beside her. She became unreasonably angry because he had shown her sympathy. She didn't want his or anybody's pity, but when she lifted her eyes to his face and saw the tender pity in his loyal, honest eyes, her pride melted away, and she wept bitterly. She felt her shoulder encircled by a strong young arm, and her head pressed against a firm young shoulder.

"Cry away, little cousin, it will do you good."

And cry she did for ten minutes or more. Then Gunther dried her tears, and chafed her hands, and kissed her once more, and behaved generally as a big, kind, affectionate brother might have done.

"It's quite as hard on you, Gunther," she said finally.

"No, it's not. You didn't believe me the other day when I told you I was through with Sylvia. It's bad enough for a chap to want something for years and years that he cannot have, but it's infinitely worse to find quite suddenly that you no longer want what you have been wanting so long, and that you are a bally idiot for ever having wanted it."

"Poor old Gunther!"

"Ulrich is a fool. He will bitterly regret what he is doing when it is too late. I am going to England. There's nothing I want in this wide world, I find, but perhaps I can forget the aching void which takes the place of what was once my heart, in trying to amuse little Mary. I shall play tennis and golf and croquet with her, and take her motoring and sing her the *Studenten-*

lieder, which she tells me she loves to hear me sing, and perhaps that will help me forget my troubles."

"What a brick you are, Gunther!"

And so they parted.

Alice remained in "*Seelenruh*" another week. She had written to Ulrich to send someone to whom she could turn over the keys, but he wrote back, asking her to remain in the place as long as she pleased; but she was anxious to get away. Her personal possessions were packed; the rooms were dismantled, the furniture swathed in Holland covers, the valuable oil paintings covered with netting, the beautiful gold and silver plate housed in the enormous safe; everything was arranged as for a long, long absence. She supposed Ulrich would dispose of the furniture, and the silver and the bric-à-brac by private sale. She was certain he would never enter the house again.

And still she stayed on. A wild hope kept her there. From day to day she hoped that a miracle would happen which would send Ulrich back to her. She could not believe that everything was at an end between them, that he would be able to erase her so effectually out of his life.

Finally she could bear the loneliness of the quiet, dismantled house no longer. She decided quite suddenly one morning to leave for Berlin. She telegraphed to the 'Adlon, bade Estelle finish packing, and left with her maid by the noon train. As she stepped into the magnificent automobile, which she was to use for the last time, a sensation of despair came over her. Not once did she glance back at the exquisite mansion which she was leaving, nor at the noble old trees which she had loved so well, at the sweeping lawns where she had walked so often with Ulrich in summer evenings.

That chapter of her life was closed—forever.

The day after she left the servants were startled by seeing the tall, commanding figure they knew so well marching up the stairs and into the hall.

"Announce me to the Countess."

"The Countess left for Berlin yesterday, your Majesty."

"At what hotel is she stopping?"

They told him.

He did not leave, but strode past the servants, up the stairs and into the little boudoir which he had taken such joy in furnishing for her five years before. So wild and haggard was his face, that the servants, huddled together in the large hall, waited anxiously for they knew not what—the report of a pistol perhaps.

But Ulrich had no intention of committing suicide. He stalked up and down the little room, and half unconscious of what he was doing, opened her desk. It was empty. He opened her work-table. A forgotten bit of needlework which she had overlooked in the hurry of leaving, remained. He had frequently seen her at work on it, and he stared at it stupidly, not able to comprehend that she would never finish it, that her hand had touched and handled the wrinkled bit of linen for the last time.

He flung the embroidery away from him, and resumed pacing the floor.

"My God!" he cried suddenly, "I cannot give her up, I cannot."

He halted at the window-seat, where, stretched at full length, half asleep over some book, she had waited for him so often until long after midnight when he had been detained. The pillows lay as she had left them. The impression her head and shoulders had made was still visible. A tortoise shell hairpin lay in a crease of the pillow.

He took it up tenderly, and suddenly he dropped on his knees and buried his face in the pillows against which her body had rested. It seemed to him that the warm, sweet perfume of her skin and hair still clung to the cushion. He moaned. He pressed the cushion against his face until he was almost smothered. Then he threw it away from him and began beating his hands upon the walls, upon the floor, against the seat.

"I cannot give her up, I cannot!" he groaned.

Presently he began weeping. It was years since he had cried—not since Egon's death—but those tears had been tender and sweet compared to the terrible tempest of tears that seemed now to rend his soul. He was frantic with the anguish of it all.

When he finally stumbled to his feet, there had come to him, without any volition of his own, a realization of what his decision must be. There was one way only, and he meant to take it.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Alice had intended remaining in Berlin only one or two days, but she happened to meet Sally, and in her new terror of being alone, she was heartily glad of her old friend's company. So she remained longer.

The week brought her three important letters, from the Grandduke, from Bouchère, and from von Garde, and each of these three letters contained an offer of marriage. The Frenchman's was elegant and crisp, the Russian's almost Oriental in its deliberate display of passion, and she read each of these two letters twice. But von Garde's she read many times. It was tender, reverential, solicitous, and the very essence of the man seemed to be wafted from his letter.

Alice had not heard directly from him since that painful interview following the fateful ball, and it touched her deeply to think that he still loved her sufficiently to care to marry her. She asked herself whether it would not be possible to find some semblance of happiness in trying to secure his. In spite of the bitter recollections which clung to him, perhaps because of them, she felt a deep-rooted fondness for him. It was out of the question that she would ever love him, or any other man, but she wondered whether she would not be happier in accepting obligations toward some human being than by drifting alone down the stream of life.

She thought the matter over for three days, and then wrote him, telling him that if he was satisfied to marry her knowing that she could not give him any love. only

whole-hearted and sincere affection and respect, she was willing that he should do so.

But after she had written the letter, memories of Ulrich came to harass her, and all her love, her passion and her desire for Ulrich came rushing back upon her. She tore the letter she had written to von Garde, and flung it into the paper-basket, and then, like a poor, caged thing, she walked around and around the room.

Why should she be compelled to give up Ulrich? She had overestimated her strength. Even if the marriage were unavoidable, that was really no reason why he and she should separate. What were considerations of honor, of self-respect, of anything in the wide world compared to such love as theirs? She would write Ulrich the next day. No, she would return to Hohen that very night. She would go to him, and say, "Ulrich, I cannot live without you any more than you can live without me. I must hear your voice, be near you, see you. Otherwise I shall go insane. Marry Sylvia. Accept her terms. Be her husband for three months, for six months, for a year—until the succession is secured—and then come back to me."

With a start, she pulled up before the mirror. She looked at her image as she would have looked at the face of a stranger. And sanity returned.

"Heavens and earth!" she muttered aloud, "have I sunk as low as that?"

She took a sheet of writing paper from her desk, and wrote von Garde, thanking him for his faith in her, and assuring him that it added to her own distress to know she must give him this new pain by rejecting his offer.

Ringling for the maid, and without looking, she pointed to the letter and told her to mail it. But Estelle was not listening. She seemed strangely excited.

"Oh, Madame!" she cried, "Madame——"

"What is it?" demanded Alice.

"The King is here, Madame!"

Ulrich had already entered the room. The maid fled through the open door. He turned and closed the door behind her.

Pale and trembling Alice stood and stared at him. The expression on her face was the expression of a woman who has seen a ghost.

He put down his high silk hat on a chair, threw down his gloves, and took off his overcoat. Then he faced her, standing on the opposite side of the table.

Neither had spoken so far.

"Alice," he said, "we have been very foolish and very wicked, both of us, you as well as myself. We have believed that we could fly in the face of Providence, and tear out of our hearts a love such as is rarely given to man and woman to feel for each other. My chief sins have been selfishness, ambition, insincerity. Your one sin has been damnable pride. We've made a sorry mess of things so far. Now we are going to take the right road, the only road that can bring us both happiness."

"What do you mean?" she faltered.

"I mean that we are going to be married."

"No, Ulrich, I will not marry you. You have too great an aversion for a morganatic alliance. I will not marry you."

"Yes, Alice, you will marry me, because I wish it."

"But Sylvia?"

"The engagement is broken off. Old Freiin von Schwellenberg is dying, as you know. She wrote and begged me to come and see her. It seems her conscience was troubling her. She wished to make a clean breast of certain things concerning Sylvia and yourself. She

told me that from the very first day that Sylvia saw you, she planned and contrived how to use you as a cat's-paw, either to get me out of the way, or to hold me in Hohen so that the Princess could ultimately marry me. Finally, despairing of our marriage, and perceiving that we were not tiring of each other, she invited Boris to come to Hohen for the express purpose of alienating you from me."

"I knew all that long ago."

"And your pride kept you from telling me!" he said reproachfully. "Well, I went to Sylvia, confronted her with the facts, and asked her to release me from the engagement. She refused. Then I told her that if she continued to refuse, I would break the engagement. I gave her just twenty-four hours to decide which it should be. She began to cry, and implored me to give her more time. It seems that as long as she saw that the game was up, she might as well marry the man she loved. She wished Gunther to think that her heart, and not my brutality, had prompted the step. Most opportunely Gunther was announced just then. He had arrived from England that day, and asked to see me. He came into the room very solemnly, and instead of kissing Sylvia on the cheek, as he has always done when we are *entre nous*, he bowed very magnificently, and kissed her hand, and called her Grand-duchess. Sylvia, stammering and stuttering over the lie, told him that she felt she must follow the dictates of her heart, and as I had generously promised to release her, she had ultimately concluded to marry the only man she had ever loved. With another magnificent bow, Gunther said, 'I regret, Grand-duchess, to be forced to decline the honor. I have come home to find the King, and as he is here, I may as well prefer my request at once.' Another magnificent bow, of which this time I

war the recipient. Then he continued, addressing me, 'I have come to ask your Majesty's permission to marry your cousin of England, Princess Mary.' Can you imagine Sylvia's rage? I feared a stroke of apoplexy."

"Poor Sylvia!" murmured Alice.

"Poor nothing!" retorted Ulrich. "But the best remains to be told. I said to Gunther, 'My dear boy, you are of age, Mary is your peer and wealthy. If her guardians are satisfied with the match, you need no one's consent to the alliance.' He replied: 'The King of England is the head of her family, and he has given his consent. As is customary, I must obtain the formal consent of the head of our family, of you, our King.' I replied: 'Gunther, you do not need my permission; for a week from to-day you shall be head of the von Dettles and King of Hohenhof-Hohe. I intend to abdicate.'"

The blood rushed from the girl's face and left her deathly pale.

"Ulrich, you are mad! I won't let you, I won't hear of it!" she cried wildly.

"Hush, dear, do not interrupt my story. Gunther stared hard at me, and when he realized that I meant what I said, he grabbed my hand in the big, overgrown boy way he has, and cried: 'I am glad, that at last you are going to do what is right!'" But Sylvia was inarticulate with rage, mortification and jealousy. To lose both the man she loved and the crown for which she had schemed and plotted and lied, was too bitter a blow. And then, as a fitting culmination for the little comedy, von Bardolph entered. He had overheard all. 'Grand-duchess,' he said to Sylvia, his little weasel-eyes shining with malice like green Bengal lights, 'What did I tell you years ago? "A face to change the map of empires"; and the map would have been changed, dear Grand-

duchess, if you had not bungled so lamentably but had married Gunther as you should have done years ago.' That, Alice, is the end of my story."

"I won't let you abdicate!" she cried.

"My dear Alice," said Ulrich firmly, "I am going to do just as I please in this matter."

"I will not marry you if you abdicate," she cried. "I will return to you—as before—I will marry you morганatically. I will not hear of your abdicating."

He came and stood beside her, and opened his arms. She crept into them, and he kissed her.

"To-morrow morning," he said, "the great news of my abdication will be flashed around the world; three days hence I sign the papers. Then Gunther will be King and I shall be plain Ulrich von Dette."

"Don't do it, Ulrich, don't do it," she entreated.

"I have done it, dear child," he said. "And if you refuse to marry me, I shall present myself at your door once a day, and propose to you, and finally you will say, 'Yes.' Alice, darling, you're not going to be foolish, are you, and spoil things?"

"Oh, Ulrich, Ulrich! I love you so passionately—I cannot let you make this sacrifice."

"It is no sacrifice, darling," he whispered. "To renounce you would be the only sacrifice worthy of the name that I can think of. I should have known this long ago, but I have been stupid, blind. And think, darling, we shall now have the right to hope for the greater joy—for the day when little feet will go pattering through the house, when little arms will cling about our necks——"

"Ulrich, Ulrich!" she moaned, "you are bribing me shamelessly."

"You were mistaken, Alice, in one particular. Spring-

time is not over for us. Spring is in our hearts, and will remain there always and always. For ours is true love."

At last she whispered:

"Yes."

* * * * *

A week later the passenger list of one of the large ocean liners bound for New York contained the names:

"Dr. Ulrich von Dette and wife."

THE END.

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